Become the Beast

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by memequeen1127

Summary

All his feelings about Hannibal existed in a swirling tempest that was too powerful for Will to consciously control, but he was sailing through the storm like he was sailing across the sea — with determination, impulsivity, and no clear plan. There was only the need to go forward, towards Hannibal.

Will didn't know what was going to happen once he found him. He didn't know what he was going to do. Will was just as likely to kill Hannibal as he was to forgive him.

I forgive you, Will. Will you forgive me?

~

A rewrite of season 3 because I wanted to know what everyone was feeling and add some important scenes that were missing. 1 chapter = 1 episode!

Notes

Hello!

I decided to write this because, although I loved season 3, I felt like the pace was a little too fast and I missed things. I am not changing anything that happened, merely going more in-depth into scenes that did and adding on new ones that I felt happened off-screen. I am not rewriting every single scene in season 3, mainly the hannigram ones because that works best for the story (and because y'all already know what happened lol).

That being said, each chapter is still about 6k long (or more, depending on the episode). I wanted to do this right, so I didn't rush it. I hope you guys enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Title is from this absolutely amazing fansong made especially for Hannibal.

This first chapter is episode 1, so expect only Hannibal's POV. Don't worry, next chapter will be Will POV!

Enjoy :)

Antipasto

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The night was cold in Paris, but that only made Hannibal's blood rush more. He hadn't ridden a motorcycle in years, and he missed the adrenaline flooding his body every time he zipped around cars and sped faster than was strictly legal. It wasn't the act of breaking the law that excited Hannibal; it never was. It was simply how the act made him feel *alive.*

When he arrived at his destination, he removed his helmet and allowed the night air to cool his skin. He was not used to his longer hair yet, and it was sticking to the back of his neck.

It was late already and he surely had a long night ahead, but he was not tired. Hannibal was far too experienced to feel fatigue. Besides, the task this evening only required minimal focus.

He did not bother to dress for the occasion, as he would not stay long. He carried his helmet with him and walked into the black-tie farewell party, sliding around unassuming guests like a tiger moving through long grass and placing himself in a spot by the bar with an excellent view of his quarry who, after tonight, nobody would miss.

Suddenly, Hannibal sensed someone watching him. He turned to the side and found a man at the bar, about Will's age, smiling at him. His smile was bright and friendly, but Hannibal didn't care for it. It ended the man's slight resemblance to Will.

The man sidled over, eyes twinkling, and offered a name. "Antony Dimmond."

"Boris Jakov," Hannibal replied smoothly.

"I'd offer a hand, but…" he smiled again.

Hannibal mirrored with his own friendly smile. “It’s a double-fisted kind of bash.” He looked the man over, once again struck by his similarity to Will. However, he was quite tall. Will was always slightly shorter than Hannibal, about three inches shorter to be precise.

Antony Dimmond chuckled. “Do you know Roman well?”

Hannibal tilted his head.

“You were staring with the thinly-veiled disdain of a man who does,” Antony explained, eyes still sparkling. “I was his TA at Cambridge. He was insufferable even then.”

He chugged his champagne and Hannibal processed. This man knew Roman Fell quite well, but didn’t seem to like him very much. Interesting. Although Hannibal did not choose the man for his rudeness, it seemed it would be a bonus.

“Have you read his books?” Antony asked, pulling, presumably, one such book out of his coat to show Hannibal.

“They’re terrible!” he whispered, still smiling.

Hannibal said nothing, but Antony appeared to like that.

“You know they’re terrible, you’re just too polite to say,” he flirted. “Blink if you agree.”

Hannibal blinked.

Antony grinned. “See?”

He turned back to his former professor. “That doesn’t stop him squatting over his keyboard and depositing a fresh one every six to eight months.” Hannibal snagged a passing champagne class and took a swig.

“It takes me six to eight months to write one line.” Hannibal’s ears perked up. This man writes?

“Why?” he asked, deciding to match this man’s game and be friendly. Hannibal had no trouble manufacturing twinkles in his own eyes if the occasion called for it.

“Poetry is hard.” Antony smiled, as if the answer was obvious.

“Too hard for Roman,” he continued. “Well, it’s easier to slide into academia and dissect the work of others than it is to stand by his own words.”

He leaned towards Hannibal.

Hannibal leaned back. “One can appreciate another’s words without dissecting them.”

He made eye contact for a second before returning his gaze to Dr. Fell.

“Though, on occasion, dissection is the only thing that will do.”

Hannibal loved Florence. He was glad to be back, though he would have preferred to have shared the experience with a different companion.

Bedelia was not all bad. Hannibal had always found her to be interesting, in the way a cat found a canary interesting — clever, perhaps, and fun to toy with, but unquestionably a future meal.

He stood at the balcony and looked out onto the streets below, and remembered his time spent in this city as a young man. “We are among the palaces built 600 years ago by the merchant princes, the kingmakers, and the connivers of Renaissance Florence.”

Bedelia drifted next to him and handed him a glass of brandy. Hannibal looked at the amber liquid and thought of whiskey.

“As connivers of modern Florence,” Bedelia toasted.

Hannibal considered the romance of his favorite city and turned away from its view. “I found a peace here that I would preserve. I’ve killed hardly anybody during our residence.”

Hannibal was proud of himself, all things considered. He had left Will in a pool of his own blood, carved up by Hannibal’s forgiveness. It ached, but he had flown to Florence without him, with someone else in his stead. He had not planned for it, and the identities he had forged for himself, Will, and Abigail were useless, but Hannibal had always been good at thinking on his feet.

When he and Bedelia had arrived, fresh from Paris with new identities, Hannibal made sure to steer them straight into the smaller bedroom. Bedelia saw the master bedroom but said nothing, undoubtedly knowing exactly why Hannibal did not want them staying there. There were too many objects painful to look upon, and too much empty space to haunt Hannibal with Will’s ghost.

Thus, although Hannibal had a well stocked wardrobe in the master bedroom, he wasted no time in supplying himself with new clothes. Bedelia got herself some as well, and they split the small closet down the middle, careful not to touch fabrics.

All these months, Hannibal had acted like the perfect gentleman. He did not touch Bedelia without her consent, he did not feed her what she did not wish to eat, and he did not kill

anyone that did not need to be killed.

It seemed Bedelia was not as impressed with Hannibal's actions. "You created a vacancy at the *Palazzo Capponi* by removing the former curator."

"A simple process requiring a few seconds' work on the old man," Hannibal shrugged. "And, a modest outlay of two bags of cement."

"You no longer have ethical concerns, Hannibal." Bedelia observed. "You have aesthetical ones."

Hannibal's lip twitched upwards. Bedelia had not been his psychiatrist in any official capacity in some time, which was perhaps best considering the many professional boundaries they were currently crossing. It amused him that Bedelia was still so desperate to get a look at him behind the veil.

"Ethics become aesthetics," he stated.

"You seem more interested in making appearances than maintaining them," Bedelia responded after some thought. "Would you?"

She gestured to the zipper on the back of her dress and Hannibal obliged, setting his glass down before moving to stand close behind her.

"If this is about my position at the *Palazzo*," he said conversationally, "once the path was cleared, I won the job fairly. On my merits."

He unzipped the expensive dress in one fluid motion.

"Yes, even the most contentious Florentines can't resist the verse of Dante ringing off the frescoed walls," Bedelia said, moving towards the washroom.

“One contentious Florentine can,” Hannibal remarked.

Bedelia started the bath with a squeak of the faucet. “Have you given serious thought to...eating Professor Sogliato?”

She sounded frightened, Hannibal mused. Frightened, but brave enough to try and hide it.

“My killing Sogliato now would not preserve the peace,” he replied.

“Your peace is without morality.”

“Morality doesn’t exist,” Hannibal said firmly. “Only morale.”

Bedelia smiled as she considered that. “How you feel today.”

Hannibal turned his attention back onto her. “How do *you* feel today?”

He was curious to discover when Bedelia would call him out on his intention to preserve the peace — or rather, his appearance of that intention. Tonight, it seemed, she chose to believe the falsehood that he really did want to preserve the peace.

“I still believe I am in conscious control of my actions. Given your history,” she replied softly, “that’s a good day.”

Hannibal washed the blood off himself under the steady stream of the shower, and if a stray tear mixed in with the blood and the water to swirl down the drain then so be it. Tonight had

been a night of betrayal, loss, and uncontrollable forgiveness.

He forgave Will for his betrayal, then showed his forgiveness by engaging in an act of betrayal himself. He wanted to make Will feel the pain he was feeling, but it didn't make him feel any better knowing he had succeeded.

"Did you think you could change me? Like I changed you?" he had asked.

Will's response was still ringing in Hannibal's ears. His huffed laugh, and his searing words.

"I already did."

Hannibal hadn't realized it until then, but Will was right. He had changed. Hannibal wasn't quite sure how he felt about Will Graham holding that sort of power over him. He hadn't experienced anything like it since…

Mischa.

Hannibal stayed in the shower until his hands pruned, allowing his superficial wounds to be flushed clean. He took his time drying off, letting the water drip off him as he patted his face dry with a towel. He stepped out of the shower and towards the sink, intending to dress in the clean clothes he stole on his way here, when he heard the unmistakable click of a gun being cocked.

Hannibal paused and took a deep, tired breath. It seemed Bedelia had come home.

"May I get dressed?" he asked, turning towards her, unashamed of his nakedness. Bedelia was seated on the edge of her bed, a gun in one hand and a glass of wine in the other.

"You may," she granted.

Hannibal folded up his towel and started getting dressed.

“What have you done, Hannibal?” she asked. Hannibal knew she was scared, wondering why in the world he was at her home of all places. From what she knew of him — and what she didn’t — the answer could be nothing good.

“I’ve taken off my person suit,” Hannibal said lightly as he pulled on some clean trousers.

Bedelia blinked.

“ You let them see you,” she realized.

Hannibal exhaled and thought of Will’s expression just before he gutted him. “I let them see enough.”

“How does it feel,” Bedelia asked, her eyes still glued to him, “being seen?”

“Well, you’re in no position to ask, Dr. du Maurier. You ended our patient-psychiatrist relationship.”

There was no way Hannibal was ever going to tell her the depth of what he was feeling right now. It wasn’t for her. The white-hot pain was still under his skin, and he wouldn’t hesitate to kill Bedelia if she asked him about it again.

Bedelia was smart enough to heed his warning. “I lacked the appropriate skills to continue your therapy.”

Hannibal shrugged on his shirt. “I never found you to be lacking.”

Bedelia's face twitched with fear. "

I'm sorry I didn't provide you with a suitable substitute for therapy." Her apology sounded quite sincere, considering it was wrenched out of her.

There was another slight pause, then: "Is Will Graham still alive?"

Hannibal felt the wave of pain he had been swimming through that night roar up again, threatening to drown him. He wanted to skin Bedelia alive for speaking his name, no matter how much he valued her therapy.

Images flew through his mind, most of them focused on Will holding onto him in pain, or huddled on the bloody floor clutching at his gaping wound. "Will Graham was not a suitable substitute for therapy."

It hurt to admit — that Will had not chosen to be with him.

"What was he?" Bedelia dared ask. Hannibal was unsure whether it was misplaced bravery or sheer stupidity that made her speak, and turned to make eye contact for the first time in their entire conversation.

"Is this professional curiosity?" he countered, sharply.

Bedelia did not back down. "Almost entirely."

Hannibal let his mask slip a bit to show his displeasure and took a few predatory steps towards her.

" Do you trust me?" he asked in a low voice.

Bedelia exhaled, trying to regulate her fear. "Not entirely."

Hannibal broke eye contact to button his sleeves. "Have you taken into consideration my beliefs about your intentions?"

"My intentions?"

Hannibal looked up. He was turning the personal questions back on her, and it was working perfectly. She did not fight against his evasive techniques, and he knew why. Her intentions had always been rather obvious. "Human motivation can be little more than lucid greed."

Bedelia swallowed, knowing that she had been seen. Her greed to know Hannibal was clear and distasteful; however, he would allow it since he could use it to his advantage.

"Greed," Bedelia agreed. "And blind optimism."

Hannibal was still but his eyes were supremely satisfied. "You're optimistic I won't kill you."

Bedelia uncocked the gun and set it on the bed beside her. Hannibal turned away to finish getting dressed, the immediate threat having been dealt with. Bedelia was going to be his chess piece, all of her own volition. Greed and blind optimism, indeed.

Hannibal stayed late at the *Palazzo* that day, finishing up his speech to the *Studiolo* . He left his office and entered the courtyard just in time to see the golden light of the setting sun beautifully drape over the statues and the flowers. He was in a good mood after planning such a captivating lecture that would surely grant him tenured employment, and was already thinking of what he might cook for dinner.

“Hello!” a familiar voice called out to him.

Hannibal’s sharp eyes quickly sought out the source of the hail, and was pleasantly surprised to see the man from Paris strolling over to him. The man who looked like Will. The man who knew Dr. Fell.

“Bonjour!” he greeted, that unforgettable smile once again gracing his face. “Mr. Jakov, isn’t it? We met in Paris a few months back.”

Hannibal said nothing but took the hand that was offered to him.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. It’s just, here I was, and then there you were… I never forget a face,” he explained.

“Antony Dimmond,” Hannibal said with a smile.

Antony beamed. “Nice to be remembered.”

Hannibal’s smile turned slightly more suggestive. “You’re hard to forget.”

“What are you doing in Florence?” Antony asked curiously. “Are you working with Roman?”

Hannibal pretended to be taken aback by the inquiry. “Dr. Fell?”

“I heard he took an appointment at the *Capponi* library.”

“Yes, he’s the new curator and translator at the *Palazzo Capponi*.” Hannibal said smoothly. Antony seemed to have some substance under his pretty face. Hannibal was a little impressed at his ability to stay on topic and get the answers he wanted. This man didn’t miss much.

“Evidently the last one eloped with a woman. Or someone’s money. Or both,” Antony grinned.

“That’s the commonly held belief,” Hannibal said quietly.

There was a slight pause, then Hannibal smiled again at Antony. “You just missed Roman.”

“Did I?” he questioned. “Oh, was hoping to take the piss.”

They both chuckled, and Hannibal decided to take advantage of this unexpected opportunity. “Spare the piss for the time being. If you’re free, my wife and I would love to have you for dinner.”

Hannibal watched with amusement as Bedelia tried, and failed, to conceal the shaking of her hand as she brought the oyster to her mouth.

“How well do you know the Fells?” she asked Antony, obviously trying to turn away his attention from her unease. Antony smiled and answered.

“As well as anybody. Which’d be not really,” he said. “Lydia a friend of yours?”

Bedelia’s eyes widened imperceptibly at the question.

“Not really,” she said, eyes dropping back down to her oysters.

Hannibal kept watching her, enjoying her discomfort and curious to see what she would do, how well she could lie to the first stranger that Hannibal invited back to their apartment.

"I'd be surprised to hear she had one," Antony remarked. "We share a mutual detestation. She disapproves of my disapproval."

Antony's attention was focused on Bedelia, and though Hannibal could not blame him — she was a beautiful woman, after all — Hannibal wanted to find out more about him.

"What do you disapprove of?" Hannibal asked.

"Roman, mainly. Lydia isn't quite bright enough to see I'm just intimidated," Antony admitted without any shame. "Roman does, of course. How he loves to strike fear."

Hannibal walked around the table to deposit his chosen food for Bedelia on her plate. "Dante wrote that fear is almost as bitter as death."

She looked up at him, her armor beginning to crack.

"Dante wasn't dead when he wrote it," she murmured, her smile not quite reaching her eyes.

Hannibal gave her a small grin and turned his attention back to his guest.

"Traveling alone, Antony?" he asked lightly.

"The only way I travel."

Bedelia was now staring at Hannibal with undisguised fear, but he ignored her with amusement as he finished plating everyone's food.

“Roman is speaking to the *Studiolo* Friday, on Dante,” Hannibal announced as he sat down. “You should come.”

“Sounds appropriately hellish.” Antony grinned. Hannibal smiled at his answer and regarded Bedelia’s now openly fearful face with likewise open amusement.

Antony’s eyes fell upon Bedelia’s plate with interest. “Are you avoiding meats?”

Hannibal held back a smirk at the question. He knew inviting Antony for dinner was a good idea.

Bedelia swallowed. “I’m trying not to eat anything with a central nervous system.”

Antony’s smile was friendly.

“Oysters, acorns, and Marsala,” he said, nodding to her plate. “It’s what the ancient Romans would feed animals to improve their flavor.”

Hannibal watched closely as the realization hit Bedelia. She suddenly stopped chewing and her eyes widened, glancing up at Hannibal. He stared right back at her and continued to eat, a smile tugging at his lips. He wondered when she was going to figure out that she had an expiration date. It seemed she needed some outside help.

Bedelia recovered rather quickly.

“My husband,” she replied slowly, “has a very sophisticated palate. He’s very particular about how I taste.”

Well, she wasn’t lying.

Antony raised his eyebrows and glanced back and forth between Hannibal and Bedelia with deepened interest. He leaned forward.

“Is it that kind of party?” he murmured suggestively.

There was a small silence where Hannibal smirked at Bedelia to gauge her response. Inviting Antony to dinner had turned out to be an amazing idea. Hannibal was thoroughly enjoying himself now, on account of Bedelia’s fear and Antony’s eagerness for sexual intimacy.

Hannibal toyed with his fork as he considered Bedelia. He would like nothing more than for dinner to turn into “that kind of party,” but he wasn’t going to agree if Bedelia was uncomfortable with the idea. He was not that kind of predator.

As the silence dragged on and Bedelia remained quite uncomfortable, Hannibal smiled slyly.

“It’s not that kind of party,” he told Antony.

“No,” Bedelia added, suddenly exhausted. “It really isn’t.”

Antony took the rejection gracefully. “Shame. You were both suddenly so fascinating.”

He looked at Hannibal and Hannibal looked back, allowing himself a honestly amused smile and a twinkle in his eyes. Something passed between them the longer their eyes remained locked, and Hannibal was supremely satisfied to find that Antony did not take the recent rejection to be an all-encompassing rejection.

Dinner passed quickly after that and Hannibal behaved himself, only mildly flirting with Antony while dutifully paying attention to his “wife” at the same time. Bedelia only spoke when she was spoken to, her unease at being around the two of them plain. Hannibal knew

Antony was astute and picked up on this, but he undoubtedly thought Bedelia's anxiety was due to her husband's flirting and not the prospect of being eaten.

After dinner Hannibal guided Antony out the door, always the gentleman. He would not proposition the boy tonight, not when it would be seen as disrespectful to Bedelia. He was content to wait for the right moment, and as Antony caught his eye on his way out Hannibal knew he felt the same.

"*Buonasera!* " Antony bid them with a smile.

"*Buonasera*," Hannibal and Bedelia replied together.

He shut the front door gently and slowly turned around to face Bedelia, his polite smile gone from his features as he regarded her.

"You let him go," Bedelia noted, surprise in her words.

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, amusement once again dancing in his eyes. "What would you have me do, Bedelia?"

She inhaled as she considered his words. Hannibal brushed past her, pleased that he so easily pushed her to think about killing Antony Dimmond. She was not as easily malleable as Will — she was too afraid of her spark for cruelty, and did not revel in it as Will did — but she was still tractable. Hannibal had fun toying with her tonight.

Bedelia did not answer his question but instead asked one of her own. "Are you going to sleep with him?"

"Probably," Hannibal mused as he cleared their plates from the table. "Does that surprise you? Or are you perhaps jealous?"

Bedelia scoffed and took another sip of her wine. “I am not surprised, nor I am jealous. He does bear a remarkable resemblance to Will Graham, does he not?”

Hannibal does not deny it. “Indeed he does. There are noticeable differences, however. Will did not smile nearly as much as Mr. Dimmond does.”

Bedelia waved him off. “An easily overlooked trait. After all, you do not need to look at his face to do what you want to do with him.”

Hannibal smiled widely. “No, I do not.”

“I will not join in,” she declared.

“You made that abundantly clear when he proposed it, Bedelia,” Hannibal assured, rolling his sleeves further up his arms as he started washing the dishes. “Our own intimacy can be separate from my intimacy with Mr. Dimmond.”

Bedelia drained her wine glass and sighed. “My attraction to you is inconvenient,” she said. “It will most likely get me killed and eaten.”

“It most likely will,” Hannibal agreed.

“Will Antony Dimmond’s afford him the same?” she wondered.

Hannibal considered it as he finished cleaning the plates. Antony’s resemblance to Will functioned as a blessing for Hannibal as much as it did a curse.

“It could go either way,” he conceded. “I am fine with exploring this path and seeing what it brings me.”

“As you often are,” Bedelia muttered. “One could argue that spontaneity will be your downfall.”

Hannibal busied himself with drying the dishes and did not turn around to face her as he responded, “One could argue that it already has.”

The applause gradually came to a polite stop as guests trickled out of the lecture hall and the *Studiolo* stood to congratulate Hannibal. He shook a lot of hands and returned lots of smiles, pleased but not at all surprised that his lecture on Dante was well-received.

“Thank you for your kind attention,” Hannibal told them all before wishing them farewell. Two men lingered behind the rest, and Hannibal focused his attention on the one that approached him first.

“Would you say I secured my position, Professor Sogliato?” Hannibal asked without looking at him.

“The *Studiolo* seemed… satisfied,” Professor Sogliato acknowledged stiffly.

“Satisfied?” Antony Dimmond waltzed up with a knowing smirk. “I thought the applause was downright enthusiastic, in its soft and dusty way.”

His eyes were fixed on Hannibal, but Hannibal did not look at him either and continued to slowly pack up his materials.

Professor Sogliato hummed begrudgingly then politely responded to Antony. “*Dottore* Fell is a friend of yours?”

Hannibal’s ears perked up, curious as to what Antony would say.

“I was his TA at Cambridge,” he replied. “The tales I could tell…”

Hannibal finally looked up to face him, and Antony’s sparkling eyes met his.

Sogliato smiled. “Please do.”

Hannibal broke their gaze, but continued to feel Antony’s eyes on him as he responded, “What kind of friend would I be?”

Sogliato’s face turned annoyed. ‘What kind of friend, indeed. *Dottore*,” he said in farewell, leaving Hannibal and Antony alone.

It was only then, when they were completely alone, that Hannibal stopped his movements to pack up and turned to face Antony’s interest. He was smiling, obviously pleased to be in on the secret, regardless of not knowing the exact nature of the secret. Hannibal could tell he was intrigued, and perhaps even more attracted to Hannibal now than he was before.

Antony gave him a flirty look and spun around to peruse the displayed collection.

“An exposition of atrocious torture instruments appeals to connoisseurs of the very worst in mankind,” he started.

Hannibal followed behind him and they both made their way through the collection. “Now that ceaseless exposure has calloused us into the lewd and vulgar, it is instructive to see what still seems wicked to us.”

“What still slaps the clammy flab of our submissive consciousness hard enough to get our attention?” Antony played along, not expressing fear of any kind.

Hannibal liked that. Unlike Bedelia, Will was never afraid of him. Neither was Antony Dimmond, it seemed.

"What wickedness has your attention, Mr. Dimmond?"

Antony stopped walking.

"Yours," he said, turning around. *"Dr. Fell."*

Hannibal did not smile but that didn't seem to phase Antony, who gave his own smile and spun around to continue walking past the various torture instruments. "I have no delusions about morality. If I did, I would've gone to *la polizia*."

"I'm curious as to what fate befell Dr. Fell to see you here in his stead," Antony continued.

Hannibal smiled slightly and nodded to the closest torture tool. "You may have to strap me to the breaking wheel to loosen my tongue."

"You overestimate my affection for the genuine Dr. Fell," Antony murmured, his eyes burning into Hannibal's. "Clearly, you found him as distasteful as I did."

Hannibal's smile grew wider. "On the contrary."

Antony furrowed his brows in confusion for a moment before he laughed quietly. He took a step closer to Hannibal and whispered, "We can twist ourselves into all manner of uncomfortable positions just to maintain appearances — with or without a breaking wheel."

Hannibal's eyes flickered down to Antony's lips. "Are you here to twist me into an uncomfortable position?"

“I’m here to help you untwist,” Antony whispered coyly, “to our mutual benefit.”

Hannibal smirked, then nodded. “Would you like to accompany me back to my apartment, Mr. Dimmond?”

Antony mirrored his smirk in response. “It would be my pleasure.”

Hannibal unlocked the door to his apartment and looked over his shoulder.

“Do not worry about my wife,” he said. “We have already talked about this.”

Antony placed a warm hand on his shoulder. “I wasn’t thinking about her at all.”

Hannibal grinned and opened the door. “Neither was I.”

They strode into the apartment together, and Hannibal was amused to see Bedelia, dressed in traveling clothes carrying bags. Antony noticed too.

“Going somewhere?”

Bedelia looked at Hannibal who looked back for a moment before turning to shut the door and lock it tight.

Bedelia set her bags down and took off her hat with trembling hands. “Just preparing for a trip tomorrow,” she said, attempting to smile. “Welcome back, Mr. Dimmond.”

“It’s good to be back,” Antony grinned.

Bedelia backed away from where Antony and Hannibal stood. “Please, enjoy yourselves. I think I could use a warm bath.”

With that, she retreated into the bathroom, the door locking with a soft click behind her, and Hannibal was once again alone with Antony Dimmond.

Antony took his time twirling into Hannibal’s space. He was very suave, eyes alight with mischief as he lightly touched Hannibal’s chest. “Shall we untwist now?”

Hannibal leaned forward and tugged on Antony’s hair.

“We shall,” Hannibal murmured.

Antony grinned, slightly breathless, and without wasting anymore time grabbed Hannibal’s hand and pulled him towards the direction of the bedrooms. Hannibal was distracted thinking about how Antony’s curls compared to Will’s so did not notice which bedroom the man was heading to until Antony reached for the doorknob.

“Not this one,” Hannibal said sharply. “The second bedroom.”

Antony removed his hand from the knob of the master bedroom and Hannibal exhaled. “Ah, separate intimacies?” he nodded. “I understand.”

You understand nothing, Hannibal snapped in his head. But, as he pondered Antony’s words some more… he realized the man wasn’t incorrect.

Hannibal took a calming breath and tugged Antony towards the bedroom he shared with Bedelia. Once through the door, he all but attacked the younger man by ripping his clothes off. Antony met his passion enthusiastically and in no time both men were naked.

Hannibal pushed Antony onto the bed and massaged circles into his hips with expert fingers as he pressed their bodies together. Antony moaned at the contact and bucked his hips up into Hannibal's hands, his arousal already evident.

Hannibal closed his eyes, grabbed onto Antony's hair, and willed his own excitement into existence.

It was nice, writhing against Antony like this, feeling the familiar zing of lust course through his veins. It was nice with Bedelia, too. Hannibal always had firm control over his desire, and always used it with a specific purpose in mind. Will was the only one that challenged Hannibal's tight control over himself.

Hannibal pulled Antony's hair tighter at the thought of Will and tried to focus on the attractive man beneath him. Will wasn't here, but Antony was. He was attractive, and willing, and begging Hannibal to fuck him.

"God, please," Antony groaned in his deep, accented voice. "I want you."

"Don't speak," Hannibal ordered, flipping him over onto his stomach and placing one hand on his back to hold him in place while he reached for the lubricant. Antony obeyed Hannibal's command and only gasped a little when wet fingers entered him and prepared him for what would come next.

Hannibal's mind was static as he quickly stretched out his partner. When he determined that Antony was adequately prepared, Hannibal lifted Antony onto his knees and pressed his face harder in the pillow before slicking himself up and sliding inside with one smooth motion.

Hannibal heard Antony's muffled groan into the pillow but didn't pay any attention to him apart from gripping his hips as he thrust into him hard and fast. Sex felt good to Hannibal, and he did his best to ignore the intrusive thoughts in his mind and the persistent pain in his heart as he fucked Antony harder.

The longer Hannibal was fucking him, the more pleasure he felt. It built and it built, until Hannibal had to reach down to grab onto Antony's hair and feel the curls between his fingers. It was starting to feel quite good now, and Hannibal felt his balls tighten, indicating that he was close. He was breathing fast, almost as fast as he was plowing into his partner, and if he focused hard enough on his hair and not the rest of his body then he could almost pretend it was —

"Will," Hannibal gasped, hips stuttering as he came.

Through the mindless haze of his orgasm, Hannibal felt Antony spasm around him and could smell his cum as it spurted onto the silk sheets.

Hannibal immediately pulled out and collapsed on the bed next to his partner, eyes closed and trying to catch his breath. When he recovered his strength, he reached over into the nightstand to retrieve a spare cloth and went to work wiping himself and Antony clean. Antony groaned slightly at the touch, but smiled his thanks to Hannibal through a yawn.

"Untwisting worked quite well, I'd say."

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. He knew he'd have to kill Antony sooner or later, but the man was useful in other ways first. Hannibal quite liked his curls.

Antony yawned again and slowly got up to start re-dressing. Hannibal did the same, putting on his impeccable suit. "Won't you stay for dinner?"

"Your cooking is amazing," Antony smiled. "But I'm afraid I already have plans."

Hannibal tilted his head and searched his face. "Very well. You are always welcome back."

Antony grinned. "Good to know."

Hannibal led him out of the bedroom and into the dining area where he noticed Bedelia lurking, but Antony stopped before heading towards the front door. He hesitated, and Hannibal looked at him curiously.

"Who is Will?" he inquired.

Hannibal's face immediately went dark and he felt a powerful wave of anger wash over him. He distantly heard Bedelia's gasp of fear but his focus was entirely on the audacity of the man in front of him. Antony did not seem to notice Hannibal's fury and thus was completely blindsided when Hannibal grabbed the object closest to him — a small bust on the table — and bashed him on the head violently.

You are not worthy to speak his name, Hannibal snarled inwardly. *A cheap imitation.*

Hannibal's anger took a few moments to abide to a manageable level. He composed himself, set the bust back on the table, and addressed Bedelia.

"Observe or participate?"

There was silence, during which Hannibal removed the jacket he had just put on.

"What?" Bedelia whispered.

Hannibal fixed her with his gaze and allowed some of his anger to leak into his tone. "Are you, in this very moment, observing? Or participating?"

Bedelia blinked.

"Observing," she whispered.

“You say you’re observing, but this —” Hannibal looked down to where Antony Dimmond was making a sad attempt at crawling for the door, leaving a heavy trail of blood behind. “This is participation, Bedelia.”

Bedelia looked at Antony with palpable fear.

“Did you know what he would do?” Hannibal asked, moving to invade her space. “I would prefer you answer honestly.”

“I was curious,” she said quietly.

“You were curious what would happen. You were curious what Mr. Dimmond would do. What I would do.”

Bedelia nodded slightly, mouth parted in terror.

“Did you anticipate our thoughts? Counter-thoughts? Rationalizations?” Hannibal wondered.

“Yes,” she breathed.

Hannibal stepped back and gestured towards Antony twitching on the floor. “Is this what you expected?”

“Yes,” she admitted, tears welling up in her eyes.

“That’s participation.”

By now Antony had reached the door and was reaching up towards the knob. Hannibal turned his back on Bedelia and walked over to him with purposeful rage, not hesitating at all to grip

his head and wrench it back so his neck snapped with a loud crack.

Bedelia gasped again and Hannibal returned to her. “What *have* you gotten yourself into Bedelia?”

He noticed her standing close to her bags and wearing her coat, evidently not having taken the bath she said she would. She did not leave when she had the chance, but Hannibal supposed that was because she knew Hannibal would find her.

“Shall I hang up your coat?”

She allowed him to remove it from her shoulders, crying as she did. Hannibal hung up the coat then returned to the body on the floor.

He expertly stripped Antony of his clothes — in a very different manner than before — then strode into the kitchen. He returned after a few moments with a large basin and equally large saw.

“If you do not intend to observe or participate further,” Hannibal warned quietly, “I suggest you return to your bath.”

Hannibal sat on a train bound for Palermo with a large, heavy suitcase at his feet. He stared out the window to watch the Italian countryside speed by, and he thought about Will.

He thought about what Will was doing right then. It had been about eight months since Hannibal left him on the floor, gutted, in a pool of his and Abigail’s blood. It was enough time for a full recovery, and Hannibal wondered what Will was doing now that he was well.

Whatever he was doing, he probably hated Hannibal. Quite right, too. Hannibal had done much to deserve his resentment, but Hannibal found he only regretted the single act of betrayal that Will did not know about.

Sleeping with Antony had been wrong. Not wrong because it was a man, or even someone other than Will, but wrong because Hannibal had done so as an attempt to replace Will. It was a deplorable attempt, but it was an attempt nonetheless. Antony couldn't replace Will. Nobody could replace Will.

Snails aren't the only creatures who prefer eating with company. If only that company could be Will Graham.

With the words of Abel Gideon ringing in his ears, it was then that Hannibal knew Will Graham owned his heart.

Hannibal was experiencing a new feeling — guilt. His regret of sleeping with Antony was gnawing away at him, and killing him had not been enough to relieve it. Hannibal needed to do something else, something that would tell Will everything he was feeling.

Hannibal took out of his bag a printout of the Vitruvian Man that had been given to him by a friendly tourist at the train station. He considered it, then slowly and meticulously folded it into the shape of a heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Are y'all excited for the rest of season 3??

Follow me on twitter for sneak peeks and hannibal shitposts!

Aperitivo

Chapter Summary

> “You told him we knew,” Jack stated, after a breath.
>
> “I told him to leave,” Will corrected. “‘Cause I… wanted him to run.”
>
> Will could hear Jack pursing his lips. “Why?”
>
> Will closed his eyes. The truth was caught in his throat, fighting to come out, and Will didn’t have the strength to hold it back anymore.

Chapter Notes

> A few notes on the structure, if anyone is interested ~
>
> In the first few episodes of season 3, the storytelling isn't linear. It works great in the show, but for my rewrite I wanted to make it linear so it's easier to follow their story - and because y'all have already experienced the nonlinear story and I wanted to do something different :) So, this second chapter actually covers parts of episode 2 and 4 (Will's point of view before going to Italy). I'm making the chapter titles episode names, so I named this one Aperitivo because it mostly covers stuff from that episode, as I said. Chapter 3 will be episode 2 (Primavera), chapter 4 will be episode 3 (Secondo), but then we get back on track with chapter 5 = episode 5 (Contorno)!
>
> For this chapter, we get Will's POV of all those months apart from Hannibal after Mizumono. Enjoy!! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke up.

He didn’t think he would, and was unsure if he wanted to. The last thing he remembered was lying in a pool of blood of his own creation and closing his eyes to surrender to the darkness. Abigail was dead, Hannibal had left him, and he was all alone.

The teacup that Hannibal had once shattered and tried so hard to repair was broken all over again, this time by Will's own hand.

He woke up in the hospital, realized he was alive, and was immediately hit with a whirlpool of feelings that were too jumbled to make any sense of. There was pain, so much pain that Will wasn't sure where it all came from. There was also anger, guilt, shame, and many more emotions that Will did not have the capacity to process while hooked up to various machines.

He wasn't sure if he would ever be able to fully process them.

He opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was a generic clock on the wall. Will stared at it, worried, until the minute hand started to tick. He sighed, surrendering to the fact that he had indeed survived, and now he had to deal with everything that came with living. Was that Hannibal's design?

"How do you feel?" an unfamiliar voice came from the left side of his bed. It was a doctor, asking a question that Will was in no way equipped to answer yet.

"Thirsty," he settled on.

The doctor nodded and explained his injuries, which Will tried to listen to through the buzzing in his ears.

The doctor helped Will drink some water then asked, "Feel well enough for a visitor?"

Will shrugged, uncaring, and glanced toward the door where Abigail suddenly materialized. His heart ached, knowing she was dead. He had watched Hannibal cut her throat deep, had felt her bleed out and take her last breath under his hands. She was undoubtedly dead, but Will couldn't let her go just yet.

He had tried to ignore his inner maelstrom of feelings, but it appeared his subconscious was not going to let him. Just looking at her was painful, and Will didn't know if he could handle this conversation with himself. It seemed some part of him was going to try.

The ghost of Abigail that lived inside Will walked towards him and sat on his hospital bed.

"They told me he knew exactly how to cut me. They said it was surgical," she said, eyes boring into his, repeating the words Will had just heard from the doctor.

"He wanted us to live."

Will blinked back the pain that truth brought him. Hannibal cut into him but did not intend to kill him. He wondered if that meant Hannibal cared about him, in his own fucked up way, or if he just wanted Will to suffer more. After all, life was pain. Will knew that intimately well… and now, so did Hannibal.

I let you know me. See me. I gave you a rare gift… but you didn't want it.

Will didn't need to be an empath to feel the pain Hannibal had felt in that moment. Even remembering it now, he felt a deep ache in his bones.

"He left us to die," he whispered.

"But we didn't," Abigail said simply. "He was supposed to take me with him. We were all supposed to leave together. He made a place for us."

Will clenched his eyes shut, a barrage of things he already knew but were too painful to face crashing over him. He wanted to leave with Hannibal, that night. He showed up at his house with the hope that Hannibal had already fled. All the possibilities of what could have happened if Will had done things differently were gnawing at him inside.

You were supposed to leave.

We couldn't leave without you.

"Abigail," Will whispered, begging his subconscious to take it easy on him. He could feel tears welling up in his eyes. The self-blame and self-hatred was threatening to overpower him.

"Why did you lie to him?" she demanded.

Will opened his mouth, but was choked up by another wave of guilt. His reasons for lying to Hannibal, once surely righteous, now seemed meaningless. He did want Hannibal caught… but he also wanted him to be free. Will wanted Hannibal to rot in prison for all he did, but he also wanted to run away with him.

Those conflicting desires were fighting inside him, and the resulting damage was intense, uncontrollable guilt that Will felt from both sides — the side that regretted lying to Hannibal, and the side that hated that regret.

"The wrong thing, being the right thing to do, was… too ugly a thought," Will said after a moment.

That was the only way he could explain it to himself, although he still did not know which "right thing" or "wrong thing" he was referring to. Both choices were right, and both choices were wrong.

Abigail considered him. "He gave you a chance to take it all back, and you just… kept lying."

Will swallowed with difficulty. He knew he did. Will knew that Hannibal figured out his deception during their last supper together, but he wasn't strong enough to face Hannibal's

forgiveness. Will was too weak to take the chance Hannibal offered then, and now he regretted it. He regretted it so much it made him sick to think about.

"No one had to die," she accused.

Will fought back tears. He *knew* he was at fault. Will felt betrayed by Hannibal killing Abigail to hurt him, but more than that he felt guilty because it was *his* choices that caused Hannibal to do that. Hannibal felt betrayed by Will, and wanted him to know that Abigail's death was Will's fault for lying and betraying him. Will knew Hannibal better than anyone, so he knew this to be true.

He wounded the monster, and the monster lashed out. Will couldn't fault Hannibal for doing what was in his nature, but he could still be angry with him. Being angry with Hannibal was slightly better than hating himself.

Will didn't know himself nearly as well as he knew Hannibal, which was why his mind was throwing all this pain at him. Will couldn't help but try to fight against it, even though he knew it was well-deserved and a natural attempt at processing the trauma he had been through.

"It's hard to grasp what would've happened, what could've happened…" Will said after a while, trying to convince himself. "And in some other world, did happen."

"I'm having a hard enough time dealing with this world," Abigail said coldly.

Will almost laughed while he stared at the ceiling, because wasn't that the truth. This whole Abigail illusion was an attempt by his subconscious to deal with what he had experienced in this world.

"I hope some of the other worlds are… easier on me," she mused.

“Everything that can happen, happens.” Will murmured, reassuring himself through the mind-numbing pain he was feeling from this internal confrontation. “It has to end well, and it has to end badly. It has to end every way it can… This is the way it ended for us.”

That was a theory he had stumbled across a while ago, and had resonated with. Right now, dealing with Abigail’s ghost and his soup of emotions, it seemed relevant to remember. It wasn’t healthy to dwell on what-ifs, it’s only healthy to dwell on what happened. God knows that’s enough for Will to deal with for a thousand lifetimes, in a thousand worlds.

“We don’t have an ending,” Abigail challenged. “He didn’t give us one yet.”

Will grimaced, not liking that he had so closely tied himself to Hannibal Lecter. How Will thought about his life, and how he imagined his death... it all revolved around Hannibal. He hated that he felt such a strong bond to someone so lethal, yet so addicting at the same time. Hannibal was like a toxic drug that made Will feel understood, accepted, and free. He loved their connection, and hated himself for loving it in the same breath.

“He wants us to find him,” Abigail stressed.

Will closed his eyes and whispered, “After everything he’s done… you’d still go to him?”

Will wasn’t sure why he asked. He already knew the answer. Maybe he just needed to hear himself admit it.

Abigail nodded, and Will exhaled. It felt like his chest was shrinking in on itself, but maybe that was just the leftover sensation of being gutted. He could still feel Hannibal’s knife slicing through his stomach, the newly-stitched skin tingling.

“If everything that can happen, happens… then you never really do the wrong thing,” she explained. “You’re just doing what you’re supposed to.”

Will looked away from her. She was giving voice to all his deepest thoughts and desires, forcing himself to deal with them. Wanting to go to Hannibal and excusing that desire by thinking it's what he's supposed to do… it's something Will *wanted* to believe with the entirety of his being. That all-encompassing need to be with Hannibal, to forgive him… the sheer power of it was what he felt so guilty about. *He shouldn't want it.*

Will sank back into his hospital bed, pushed the ghost of Abigail back inside him, and let the doctor call in Frederick Chilton, his real visitor.

A few months later, after Will was released from the hospital, he got to work.

He went back to his house in Wolf Trap, but being home brought him no comfort. Hannibal wasn't there, but Will knew where he was. He mentioned that the Norman Chapel in Palermo would be the entrance to his mind palace. Will knew he would find Hannibal there, if he would find him anywhere.

Will wasn't quite sure what he would do once he saw Hannibal again, but he knew he had to go to him. They didn't have an ending yet.

It would've been easy to get on a flight and go to Italy as soon as he got released from the hospital, but Will wasn't quite ready to see Hannibal then. He needed his mind to quiet down, he wanted to be as rational as possible when he saw Hannibal again because he was afraid what he would do if he wasn't.

So, Will did what always worked best for silencing his loud mind — he worked on a boat motor.

He took the money he would've used on a first-class flight to Italy and instead bought a long-distance sailing boat. It needed a lot of fixing up, but that's what Will liked most about it. He named it *NOLA* , in a rare fit of homesickness for the place he had felt the most at home, before finding his home in Hannibal. Fixing up the boat and working on the motor gave him the mind-numbing, predictable work that he needed to quiet his mind.

However, it didn't always work. Sometimes, like now, Will's mind rebelled and reminded him of memories and desires that he would rather bury deep down for the rest of his life, or until he could let them all out with Hannibal.

Will thought about that night in Baltimore, the last night he had seen Hannibal. He had been so indecisive about what path to take, and even now he couldn't say for sure if he decided either way. He just knew that he had chosen to warn Hannibal.

As he worked on the boat motor, Will's mind drifted into imagining the possibility of what might have happened if he did what Hannibal wanted him to do — what he himself wanted to do, more than he cared to admit — if he had sided with Hannibal, and came running to his side like the fox did when he heard the rabbit scream.

He imagined all three of them sitting at Hannibal's pristine dining room table, Jack at the head and Hannibal and Will on either side. The table is set with extravagant dishes, but no one is paying attention to the food. The tension is high, this night where Hannibal and Jack are out for each other and each expects Will to come to their aid. They both look at Will, but it is not their secretive glances that sway his decision either way.

The movement of Jack's arm going to draw his gun is what sets Will in motion. That one little action, one that Will had entirely predicted, is enough to push him to Hannibal's side. It's an excuse to do what he's been trying to deny himself, and excuse *to be* who he's been denying inside. Will lunges for Jack's arm, holding him down to prevent him from retrieving his gun, and catches the shockingly betrayed look on Jack's face before Hannibal is there, slicing Jack's neck with elegant precision.

Blood sprays over Will, and he cannot stop looking at Hannibal while holding down Jack's shaking body. The feeling he's experiencing is one of *consummation.*

The illusion of what Will wished could have been was broken by footsteps crunching over the freshly packed snow.

He was slightly surprised that anyone had sought him out, after being fired from the FBI and just barely let off for the murder of Randall Tier. He looked over his shoulder to see Jack

Crawford, and was unsure whether the twist he felt in his gut was happiness or revulsion.

Considering what Will had just been daydreaming about, he figured it was revulsion.

“I had hoped you would come look for me,” Jack started. “But I understand why you didn’t.”

Will didn’t say anything at first and continued working on *NOLA*’s motor. When it became clear that Jack wasn’t going to leave without a conversation, Will sighed. “What can I do for you, Jack?”

Well I’m here to, uh, make sure that you don’t contradict the official narrative.”

“Uh-huh,” Will said skeptically.

“Well, we’re officers of the FBI, wounded in the course of heroic duty,” Jack continued.

Will held back a snort at how incredibly untrue that entire statement was.

“That’s not true for either of us,” he replied, reaching for a piston ring.

“Well, we were supposed to go together. That’s...that’s on me. My foul. My bad,” Jack placated.

Will chose not to point out that out of all the things that went wrong that night, Jack going to Hannibal’s house without him was the last thing on his mind.

“Not all of our choices are consciously calculated,” he said quietly.

“No,” Jack sighed. “But our decisions are.”

Will did not like where this conversation was going and tried harder to focus on fixing the motor instead of the growing unease in his stomach.

“You remember when you decided to call Hannibal?” Jack asked, off-hand.

Will kept his eyes lowered on his work as he tried to answer casually. “I wasn’t decided when I called him. I just called him.”

He snuck a glance at Jack over his shoulder.

“I deliberated, while the phone rang. I decided… when I heard his voice,” Will admitted softly. He could feel Jack’s stare like a target on his back, and forced his body to stay relaxed.

“You told him we knew,” Jack stated, after a breath.

“I told him to leave,” Will corrected. “‘Cause I… wanted him to run.”

Will could hear Jack pursing his lips. “Why?”

Will closed his eyes. The truth was caught in his throat, fighting to come out, and Will didn’t have the strength to hold it back anymore.

Did you believe you could change me? The way I’ve changed you?

I already did.

“Because… because he — he was my friend,” Will whispered. “And because… I wanted to run away with him.”

Jack was silent behind his back, and Will did not turn around to see his expression, sure it was one of disgust and horrified realization at his confession. He kept working on his boat motor, willing the task to numb his mind like it sometimes, but not always, did.

Eventually, after an unknown amount of time spent in silence, Jack walked away, his footsteps crunching in the snow louder than when he had arrived.

The day came when Will finished fixing up *NOLA*, and the pain he had been ignoring for the past several months hit him with full force.

It wasn’t just pain, either. The swirling mix of emotion he felt at the hospital was threatening to overwhelm him once again, because he no longer had anything to distract himself with. He was forced to confront his tangle of feelings surrounding Hannibal, or else risking insanity by continuing to ignore them. Will hated addressing his feelings, but he hated feeling crazy even more. Hannibal had helped him realize that.

The anger, guilt, and pain seemed to be the strongest, so Will tackled those feelings first.

He felt guilty for deceiving Hannibal. Will had taken Hannibal’s deepest desires and used them to trap him, and his last-minute phone call of warning was not enough of an apology. Will unquestionably felt guilty about tricking Hannibal, and that guilt fed into even more guilt because he wasn’t *supposed* to feel guilty about trying to catch the most dangerous serial killer in modern American history.

The Chesapeake Ripper did not deserve Will’s care or guilt, only his anger and his hate. Hannibal had lied to him, manipulated him, framed him for murder, gaslit him, slept with Alana, and killed Beverly. Will was still upset about those things, but at the same time it was

like he didn't care about them at all. He just felt so *guilty* about betraying Hannibal, and that made him sick with shame.

Will was also sick with anger, the kind that made his teeth gnash and his hands shake. He had many reasons to feel angry, but the one reason he kept replaying over and over in his mind was Hannibal's decision to hurt Abigail to hurt him. Will felt furious at Hannibal for killing Abigail.

She was not some toy for Hannibal to use to garner a reaction from Will, although that's exactly what she ended up being. Twice, Hannibal had made Will mourn her death. Will hated that Hannibal used their surrogate daughter like that. Abigail deserved her own life, and Hannibal had taken that life and snuffed it out, all to make Will feel pain.

It did make Will feel pain. It felt like his heart was being ripped out of his chest as he lay on Hannibal's floor, holding Abigail as she died. He still remembered that excruciating pain, every time he remembered the scene or when Abigail's ghost confronted him with his inner demons. He did feel pain, but he felt anger at Hannibal for causing that pain as well.

The anger and the terrible guilt were constantly battling for dominance over one another inside Will, but he knew that the pain held dominion over both. The pain was a constant reminder of everything he had been through, following him everywhere like an inescapable shadow.

There was only one place he thought to go that might make the pain recede, if only for a little while. Recede... or intensify. With how conflicted Will was feeling about everything, it would probably be both. But both happening was better than nothing changing. Will could feel himself itching to take *NOLA* out on the open ocean and towards Hannibal, but he still had to work through some things before he allowed himself to do that.

Hannibal's house was empty and cold, long devoid of any physical traces of the crimes committed there or the cleaners that scrubbed those crimes away. Will entered through the unlocked front door, and his feet carried him straight to where he had last seen his family.

The kitchen seemed bigger without all the furniture and appliances. Will could imagine how it was 6 months ago, bright and full of activity. He always enjoyed watching Hannibal cook,

or more accurately, he enjoyed watching Hannibal enjoy something. It was one of those rare moments when Hannibal didn't completely hide himself from others.

I let you know me. See me.

Will gave a soft, painful sound and slid against the cabinet to sit on the floor, in the exact same spot Hannibal had dropped him after gutting him. The memories of that night were starting to come back, playing in his mind like the tearful scene in a romance movie. The comparison was ridiculous, but it was the only thing that Will could think of that even came close to mimicking how he was feeling in that kitchen.

"What did you think would happen, when you came here that night?" Abigail's voice came, cutting off his disordered thinking.

Will looked to his left and saw her sitting there against the cabinet with him. She looked different than she did at the hospital. Then, she looked alive, a reflection of what Will was feeling inside. Now, she was still a reflection of him, but her appearance was exactly the same as when she died in this room, with the same clothes and blood smeared on her face.

Will sighed, accepting what his subconscious was trying to do. The best way to work through all the pain he was feeling was diving straight into it. After all, why else would he choose to come here, the place where everything in his life fell apart?

"I don't know what I thought," Will answered. "I hoped that I wouldn't find him here. I hoped I would show up after he'd gone, and deal with the aftermath."

"He'd never let you off that easy," Abigail argued. "He always wanted to push you into impossible situations, see what you'd do. You knew that."

"I knew that." Will repeated, closing his eyes.

"Since you knew that, what did you think would happen?" Abigail insisted.

Will was silent for a moment before he took a shuddering breath. “I thought… I thought I’d have to choose, between him and Jack. I was scared of the choice I would make.”

Abigail nodded, pleased that he’d admitted it. “Except, he removed that choice from you. Jack was already bleeding out when you got here.”

“He thought I had already made my choice,” Will whispered.

“He felt betrayed,” Abigail noted. “Rightfully so.”

“Rightfully so,” Will murmured, another wave of guilt rushing through him.

Abigail tilted her head, so much like Hannibal that Will felt a stab of pain at the sight. “When you saw me, and you saw him, what do you feel?”

“A flood of happiness followed immediately by a flood of sadness,” Will replied, eyes far away. “I was happy that you were alive, grateful to him that he kept you alive, but then sad because he was still here.”

“He had not left when you warned him,” Abigail finished. “You felt sad about that.”

“He was supposed to leave,” Will whispered.

“We couldn’t leave without you,” she reminded him. “What would you have done, if he had left?”

Will sighed, tilting his head back to rest on the cabinet behind him. “I thought I was done thinking about what-ifs.”

“Maybe you are,” she replied. “But I’m not.”

Will closed his eyes again and thought of his words to Jack. *Because I wanted to run away with him.*

“I suppose,” he said, after a pause, “that I would have followed him.”

She nods in approval. “He held your face right before he stabbed you. Why did you let him?”

“I didn’t expect him to stab me,” Will grumbled.

Abigail grinned. “What did you expect him to do?”

Will considered her question, grateful for its directness distracting him from all the other pain of that night. He remembered meeting Hannibal’s gaze with wide, vulnerable eyes. What he saw in Hannibal’s eyes was a complicated mess of betrayal, anguish, violence, and gentleness. It’s a mixture he often felt from Hannibal non-directly, but seeing it emulate from his eyes froze Will in place.

With his eyes still closed, he thought about how it felt when Hannibal cupped his face. He didn’t grab it, or tug on his hair. Instead, his touch was gentle, too gentle for an enemy. Too gentle, even, for a friend.

“I expected him to kiss me,” Will whispered, giving voice to something he’d pushed deep down.

Abigail, being his other self, was immensely satisfied at his confession. It was her job to make his repressed thoughts and emotions into conscious ones, but Will did not like this self-administered therapy.

“Did you want him to kiss you?” she pushed.

That was something that Will was definitely not ready to explore, no matter what certain parts of himself thought. He quickly changed the subject. “You were so afraid of me, that last time I saw you… Before the last time I saw you…”

“Your brain was on fire,” Abigail reminded him. “It’s only natural that I was scared of you. You were slipping out of reality.”

Will scoffed quietly. More like Hannibal was pulling reality out from under him.

Suddenly, he was distracted from their conversation by the dull sound of a wheelchair rolling across hardwood floors. Will took a deep breath and didn’t bother to hide his pained expression as his former friend rolled into the kitchen.

“What are you doing here?” Will inquired with some heat, not bothering to turn his head to look at her.

“I guess I’m looking for you,” Alana said quietly.

“That’s a good guess,” Will replied.

“What are you doing here?” Alana asked in return. Will held back his eye-roll at how genuinely confused she sounded.

“Mm, visiting old friends.”

Will felt Alana’s gaze leave him and scan the kitchen. “You’re not tempted to forget?”

“No, no. I don’t want to forget,” Will said, still staring blankly into the dark, open space of the kitchen before him. “I’m building rooms in my memory palace for all my friends.”

“Friendship with Hannibal is blackmail, elevated to the level of love,” Alana mused.

Will swallowed. “A mutually unspoken pact to ignore the worst in one another in order to continue enjoying the best.”

He could feel Alana looking at him again. “After everything he’s done… can you still ignore the worst in him?”

Will closed his eyes for a moment at the pain he felt stabbing into him from her question. Isn’t that exactly what he came here to discover?

“I came here to be alone, Alana,” he warned. Will finally turned his head to look at Alana for the first time in their entire conversation. She looked different, more hardened. Will wondered if he looked the same. “If you wouldn’t mind…”

She wheeled away without another word and Will turned back to smile at Abigail. She gave him a smile in return, and the two of them sat there in silence for several more minutes, contemplating the night that everything fell apart.

A few weeks later, on a chilly winter day, Will returned home from walking his dogs and had a voicemail from Alana.

“Bella died, Will,” Alana’s sad voice crackled over the phone speakers. “The funeral is Saturday from 10 to 1.”

It wasn't surprising news, but Will still felt a surge of pity for Jack. No matter how fragmented their friendship was, Jack was still the closest thing to a friend Will had. He knew Jack loved his wife, and through his empathy also knew that living without one's other half was a flawed existence.

Well, maybe he didn't know that entirely from his empathy. Will felt Hannibal's absence like a part of his soul was carved out and flayed.

He put on his best suit on the day of the funeral, and desperately tried to push any grief for Hannibal out of his mind. He was going to mourn Bella, and mourning anyone else would just be disrespectful.

Of course, Will had never been all that respectful.

When he walked into the church, he was surprised to see the pews empty save for Jack sitting in the first one. *Front row seat*, Will's mind supplied unhelpfully.

He slid into the pew behind him and listened as Jack poured out his grief.

"I hope that she's somewhere today, Jack," Will said quietly. "And that she's comfortable."

"I hope she can see it in my heart. She had to die on me. I knew it was coming, and it still smarts." Jack collected himself and sighed. "I know what's coming for you, Will."

Will furrowed his brows slightly, but when Jack stood and handed him an envelope with familiar, swooping handwriting before walking out of the church, Will knew what he meant.

Hannibal's letter was respectful, or as respectful as it could possibly be coming from a serial killer who stabbed the recipient. Will ran his fingers over the dried ink on the expensive paper and imagined Hannibal writing. He would sit at a desk, elegantly hunched over as his old-fashioned pen scratched the paper.

Hannibal had written a quote from John Donne, one that made Will swallow dryly.

O wrangling schools, that search what fire… Shall burn this world, had none the wit.

Will closed his eyes, breathed once, and tucked the letter into his coat pocket before walking out of the funeral, trying to leave his grief where grief belonged.

When Will could no longer control his longing with talks with Abigail's ghost, he knew it was time. He had exhausted all his excuses, and knew what he had to do.

He packed up *NOLA*, texted Alana about the dogs, and drove to the coast. He needed a marina with access to the open sea, and had found the address of a perfect one months ago, just waiting for him. It didn't have to wait any longer, and neither did he.

He hadn't sailed in years, but the skills were ingrained in his muscle memory. He untethered from the dock, hoisted the sails, pointed the boat into the direction of the wind, and set off into the open water. The wind was fierce that day, and Will was finally able to breathe through all the emotions suffocating him.

All his feelings about Hannibal existed in a swirling tempest that was too powerful for Will to consciously control, but he was sailing through the storm like he was sailing across the sea — with determination, impulsivity, and no clear plan. There was only the need to go forward, towards Hannibal.

Will didn't know what was going to happen once he found him. He didn't know what he was going to do. Will was just as likely to kill Hannibal as he was to forgive him.

I forgive you, Will. Will you forgive me?

Will inhaled, tasting the salt of the ocean on his tongue and the cool breeze on his face. Whatever awaited him in Palermo, Will was ready for it.

He was ready to see Hannibal again.

Chapter End Notes

Did y'all like Will's POV as much as Hannibal's?

Thanks for reading :)

Primavera

Chapter Summary

> There, in the center of the mosaic aisle in front of the altar, was the image of a skeletal torso. Will stared at it and heard Hannibal's voice in his mind. *A skull, engraven on the floor.*
>
> The skeleton was tightly holding a heart in its hands, but its face was turned away.
>
> Will's own heart felt heavy. "Nothing would thrill Hannibal more than to see this roof collapse mid-Mass, packed pews, choir singing… He would just love it."
>
> Will sighed and turned his gaze from the skull on the floor up to the image of Jesus on the domed ceiling. "And he thinks... God would love it too."

Chapter Notes

> Finally, Will gets to Italy!! This is one of my favorite episodes from the show and it was so fun to write :) Hope y'all enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will walked into the Norman Chapel in Palermo and was immediately seized with awe.

He docked in Sicily at about three in the afternoon, and as soon as he stepped foot on land he asked the locals for directions to the *Cappella.* After all these long months he was so close, and he couldn't focus on anything except how to get to the church Hannibal had specifically mentioned to him. And now, about half an hour after he arrived in Palermo - about eight months after being gutted and abandoned — he was here.

Will had never been particularly religious; even growing up, his father was not a God-fearing man. He thought of religion abstractly, and only stepped foot in a church for the occasional funeral.

He had never seen a church like this before.

It wasn't particularly big, but every inch of the walls, flooring, and ceiling were beautifully decorated in the Byzantine style. Will's eyes flitted around to take in all of the different but equally ornate designs; the floor was mostly mosaic, the ceiling and walls painted to depict scenes of saints, angels, and God. It was the most artistic church Will had ever been to, and he felt an appreciation for the ancient architecture a lot more than an appreciation for any kind of spiritual power.

It was just the type of place Hannibal would love, and Will's heart ached by how close he felt to the man here.

"Even in an enlightened world," he said softly, looking at the crowd of people around him, "we come here to feel closer to God."

"Do you feel closer to God?" Abigail asked. His mind had dressed her in an outfit he had never seen her wear before, a trick played by his subconscious to give him the comforting illusion of companionship in a foreign land.

Will made his way towards the front altar, searching for something specific. "God's not who I came here to find."

There was silence as he searched, the respectful hush for others' prayers allowing Will space to think. Hannibal told him this place was the foyer of his mind. Will wondered when he first came here. Did he feel the sacred power of this place like so many others, or did he simply come to admire the art? Did he sit in the pews, day after day, looking up at the beautiful Chapel ceiling and wishing it would crack?

Will knew Hannibal thought about God often, pondering ways in which he could defy Him with similar traits. It was awfully arrogant, but Will understood the quiet sense of power and control God had that would be attractive to Hannibal. They were attractive to the Devil, too.

"Do you believe in God?" Abigail questioned, pulling Will out of his thoughts.

“What I believe is closer to science fiction than anything in the Bible,” he replied.

“We all know it, but nobody ever says that G-dash-D won’t do a G-dash-D damned thing to answer anybody’s prayers.”

Will nodded and said critically, “God can’t save any of us, because it’s inelegant. Elegance is more important than suffering. That’s his design.”

Abigail smirked. “You talking about God or Hannibal?”

Will rolled his eyes. “Hannibal’s not God. Wouldn’t have any fun being God. *Defying* God, that’s his idea of a good time.” So much like the Devil, indeed.

Will looked down and stopped moving. There, in the center of the mosaic aisle in front of the altar, was the image of a skeletal torso. Will stared at it and heard Hannibal’s voice in his mind. *A skull, engraven on the floor.*

The skeleton was tightly holding a heart in its hands, but its face was turned away.

Will’s own heart felt heavy. “Nothing would thrill Hannibal more than to see this roof collapse mid-Mass, packed pews, choir singing… He would just love it.”

Will sighed and turned his gaze from the skull on the floor up to the image of Jesus on the domed ceiling. “And he thinks... God would love it too.”

As Will looked, a crack appeared across the top of the ceiling. His eyes widened and he reached out to catch the dust falling from above. Although he succeeded, and could see dust covering his hand, he could not feel it.

Will's imagination had always been powerful, but he was a little surprised that Hannibal's visions were starting to become his own. Then again, as Will raised his head to look upon the fake crack in the Chapel ceiling, he supposed he wasn't surprised at all.

Will was in Palermo for two weeks before a body appeared in the Norman Chapel.

He discovered this on his daily walk to the church in the mid-morning hours, when he found *la polizia* swarming the place and tourists dejectedly turning away. Will's heart skipped a beat — it must be Hannibal.

He slipped inside and was disappointed to see a screen obstructing the view of the crime scene. People were in protective gear taking pictures of whatever macabre piece of art Hannibal had left him, and Will grew anxious.

"Is it him?" Abigail urged.

I don't know, Will wanted to snap. *I hope it is, but I can't know for sure. Not yet. I need to* see.

"Per favore, signore," a uniformed police officer called out to Will. *"È proibito qui. La Cappella è chiusa."*

Will didn't take his eyes off the shielded display, straining to see through the thin white fabric. He could just make out an oval shadow, perched on some sort of easel. "I'm sorry, I don't speak—"

"The Chapel is closed," the guy repeated in English, firmly.

Will sighed out his frustration but before he could bite out a reply or leave, another police officer pointed to him and said something in rapid Italian.

“What did he say?” Will asked the first officer. If he looked beneath the bottom of the screen, he could just make out a small pool of blood gathering around the legs of the easel.

“He said he wants to talk to you.”

Will finally tore his gaze from the crime scene barrier and looked at the second man. He wasn’t uniformed like the first guy but he was wearing blue surgical gloves; a detective, then. He must be the man in charge of the investigation. If Will went with him, talked with him, he would be able to extract some answers about the body. Maybe he would even be allowed to see some crime scene photos.

He would be able to find out if Hannibal had left him something.

Will nodded his agreement and the detective barked some orders to the uniformed officer.

“I’m taking you back to the station,” he explained, shepherding Will out of the church. “You will talk there.”

He went willingly, at this point used to being herded around by law enforcement. Abigail disappeared when Will walked into the Palermo police station, and he was grateful. He didn’t need his attention split while he tried to manipulate the detective into letting him see the crime scene photos.

The officer deposited him on a bench in clear view of the manned front desk, obviously making sure Will wouldn’t run when given the chance. He wouldn’t, and Will didn’t know how to feel about being treated as a suspect. It wasn’t unjustified, but it wasn’t entirely accurate either.

There was another man on his bench but Will ignored him for now, instead turning his attention to the station itself. It was a massive building with an open floor plan, antique marble columns separating each section of desks. People were everywhere; police officers, suspects in handcuffs, and citizens with whatever business they had with the law. It reminded

Will of the criminal district court in New Orleans, and he pushed the association away quickly. That was another lifetime, a different man.

Will studied the marble floors and columns in more detail, and thought Hannibal would like this place. He'd probably like it even more because it was a police station. He'd find it amusing.

"Signor Graham," the guy on his bench stated, getting Will's attention. "Chief Investigator Rinaldo Pazzi, *Questura di Firenze*."

Firenze? Will inhaled evenly at the introduction and kept his eyes trained forward.

"You're a long way from Florence," Will noted apathetically.

"You're a long way from Baltimore," Pazzi countered.

Will turned to fix a suspicious look at the investigator. Who was this guy, and how did he know who Will was? Why was he in Palermo when he's from Florence? Will got a sinking feeling in his stomach.

"I read everything I can find on FBI profiling methods," Pazzi explained. "I read all about your incarceration."

Will looked away. "Keep reading. I was acquitted."

Pazzi stared at him for a beat, then leaned on the bench towards Will's space. "You come to Palermo and soon — very soon — a body is discovered. The priest at the *Cappella de Normani* said you have been spending a lot of time there."

Will leaned towards Pazzi like he was letting him in on a secret.

“I’ve been praying,” he whispered.

Pazzi smiled slightly. “There is some comfort in prayer,” he mused. “It leaves you with the distinct feeling you’re not alone.”

They locked eyes and Will saw straight through the other man. He knew about Will’s history at the FBI, so he also knew about his history with Hannibal. He inferred that wherever Will would be, Hannibal would be also. A fair guess, Will supposed. He hoped it was Hannibal that left the corpse at the Chapel, as this man seemed to believe. But why was a Florence detective so interested in Hannibal Lecter?

“*Signore.*” The detective from the Chapel appeared behind Pazzi and motioned at Will. *“Vieni con me.”*

Will rose from the bench and followed after him, pausing to glance back at Pazzi.

“*Ciao*,” the inspector murmured.

Will studied him for a moment, then walked away.

An hour later, Will made his way down the stairs of the police station. The conversation with the detective had not been fruitful, for both Will or the detective. They traded questions like lawyers, neither one of them giving anything away but both poking at the other’s mind. Will tried his best to get access to the pictures and information, but the detective was like a brick wall.

Frustrated at his wasted opportunity, Will bounded down the steps and was happy to see Abigail waiting for him at the bottom. He could use some time to brainstorm ideas about how

to gain access to the crime scene. His subconscious was as anxious as he was to determine if it was indeed Hannibal who left the body in the Chapel.

Suddenly, a figure appeared from the left and entered Will's field of vision. He groaned inwardly, not wanting to speak with Inspector Pazzi again.

"Is Will Graham here because of the body at the *Cappella*," Pazzi started, "Or is the body here because of Will Graham?"

Will sighed and answered Pazzi's question with one of his own. Maybe this man would be less of a brick wall and more of a thorny bush.

"Why are you here?"

"I'm like you," Pazzi responded. "I do what you do. We share the gift of imagination."

Will considered that. Sometimes it felt like nobody in the world could understand what it was like to think the way he did, but this man said he did. Will didn't entirely trust him, but the thought was nice. Except, his imagination didn't feel like a gift as much as it felt like a curse.

"I've got the scars of a man who grabbed his 'gift' by the blade," Will grumbled.

"You grabbed the wrong end."

Will laughed darkly and moved towards the exit. More like the wrong end got thrust inside his stomach.

"Those moments when the connection is made?" Pazzi sighed. "That is my keenest pleasure."

Will hesitated in front of the door. “Knowing.”

“Knowing,” Pazzi nodded. “Not feeling, not thinking.”

Will used to think those moments were his worst nightmare, but now… it was just as Pazzi said. Knowing felt good. It felt powerful.

“You know who murdered that man and left him in the *Cappella Palatina*,” Pazzi stated calmly. It wasn’t a question.

Will turned around. “Don’t you know?”

Wasn’t that why Pazzi was here? He suspected it was Hannibal who left the corpse, just like Will. Will wanted to know just how he came to that conclusion. How Pazzi knew Hannibal.

Pazzi nodded and walked closer to Will. “I met him, 20 years ago. *Il Mostro,* the monster of Florence. It was his custom to arrange his victims like a beautiful painting.”

Will inhaled imperceptibly. That sounded exactly like Hannibal. Making art out of the unworthy, elevating their rudeness to beauty. It was him.

“*Il Mostro* created images… that stayed in my mind,” Pazzi exhaled. Will watched him with sharp eyes until his gaze was drawn to pictures the inspector produced out of a yellow envelope.

“20 years ago, I was dwelling on a couple found slain in the bed of a pickup truck in Impruneta.” He handed Will a photo of the crime scene. “Bodies placed, garlanded with flowers…”

Will analyzed Hannibal’s work. It looked familiar. “Like a… Botticelli.”

“Exactly like a Botticelli,” Pazzi stressed. “His painting *la Primavera* still hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, just as it did 20 years ago. The garlanded nymph on the right, the flowers streaming from her mouth, match.”

Will stared at the photograph of the original Botticelli and imagined it hanging on a wall of dark brown wood.

“The Uffizi Gallery,” he asserted. “That’s where you met *il Mostro.*” Again, it wasn’t a question.

Pazzi looked grim. “That’s where I met this man.”

He held up a black-and-white headshot of a young man that was obviously Hannibal. Will took it, brought it close, and devoured it with his eyes.

Hannibal had the same hairstyle. Straight, dark hair that was perhaps a tad more thick in the photograph than Will remembered. His face was less lined, smooth with youth in a way that made his strong cheekbones pop out. His eyes, black and appraising, were exactly the same. So were his full lips.

“The monster of Florence,” Pazzi announced.

Will wasn’t surprised that Hannibal had made a name for himself in Italy as a young man before coming to America. He remembered him talking about living in a boarding school in Paris as a boy, after both his parents and his sister were killed. Hannibal had never told him any details, and Will had never pried. He only found out where Hannibal had grown up while in the hospital watching his segment on FBI’s Most Wanted. Hannibal’s face was plastered on every major news source across the country for weeks after his unmasking.

Will knew the facts. Hannibal Lecter, born in the Aukštaitija region of Lithuania, technically a count. He still owned land in Aukštaitija, his family’s mansion presumably. He studied medicine in Paris, then attended his residency at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. He never left.

The facts were there, but the reality of Hannibal's life was still hidden from Will. He didn't know that he had lived in Florence for a time, or was the apparently infamous *il Mostro*. Will hated being faced with the reality that he didn't know Hannibal as well as he thought he did. He wanted to know what Hannibal experienced, and where he lived it. He wanted to walk where he walked, and see what he saw.

He looked upon the photo of a young Hannibal, and imagined him sitting in front of the *la Primavera* in the Uffizi Gallery. He would have sketched it, multiple times to get the details right so he could recreate them with better materials.

"To find the inspiration *il Mostro* used was a triumph," Pazzi recalled with a distant look. "I went to the Uffizi and stood before the original *Primavera* day after day and most days.... I'd see a young Lithuanian man as transfixed by the Botticelli as I was — as transfixed as I imagined *il Mostro* would be."

Will could see it. Hannibal's young, lithe body sat respectfully in front of the painting, diligently drawing the images over and over again. He saw it so clearly he wanted to reach out and touch, but Hannibal was turned with his back to Will.

"And every day I saw him," Pazzi continued, "he would recreate the *Primavera* in pencil, just as he did in flesh."

Will closed his eyes a long moment before opening them again and handing Pazzi the picture of Hannibal back. "He likes making art."

"Yes he does," the investigator acknowledged. "Would you like to see his latest piece?"

Will's eyes snapped up. "You have pictures?"

"Pictures, and more. I can get you into the *Cappella*."

Will had been planning to go back and sneak in anyway, but having legal access was better. And those pictures were what he really wanted. He desperately needed to *see.*

“Lead the way,” Will said.

The Norman Chapel was just as beautiful at night as it was during the day, even moreso. The candlelight fell upon the frescos like moonlight, giving the entire church an otherworldly feel.

All the pews were put away because of the crime scene, but the crime scene was now gone as well. *La polizia* worked fast, it seemed, and nothing remained of the body but a few evidence markers and crime scene tape.

“You said you had photos?” Will asked as they walked in. Pazzi stopped and turned around in front of him, placing them both in the center of the Chapel.

“Signor Graham, I cannot stress the… magnitude of that moment I had, in front of the *Primavera*,” he responded. “I knew. It was the best moment of my life, a moment of epiphany — that made me famous, and then ruined me.”

Will tilted his head. Inspector Pazzi was not the bright, young, respected detective he once was. He was now older, hardened, and less trusted by his peers. Will couldn’t help but think about how his path compared to Hannibal’s. They both started out their careers together, long ago, but those careers couldn’t have had more different paths. Hannibal was always well-respected and retained his strength as he aged. He was certainly still fit, but…

He had chosen to unmask himself and lose all respect from his peers, for Will.

You were supposed to leave.

We couldn't leave without you.

Will took a deep breath and tried to focus back on what Pazzi was saying. "In haste and the heat of ambition, the *Questura* nearly destroyed the young man's home trying to find evidence."

Will walked past Pazzi towards the evidence markers on the floor, right on top of the engraved skull in the mosaic. "He doesn't leave evidence."

"No, he doesn't."

"He eats it," Will continued, ducking under the crime scene tape to get a closer look at where the corpse left by Hannibal once rested.

"Another man — not an innocent man, but innocent of those crimes — was a dream suspect," Pazzi informed him. Will sat on the steps of the altar, in front of the skull.

"He was convicted on no evidence, except his character," Pazzi finished.

Will rested his forearms on his knees. "Blame has a habit of not sticking to Hannibal Lecter."

"It has a habit of sticking to you," Pazzi pointed out, before finally handing Will the envelope of crime scene photos and walking away. In that moment, Will was grateful that Pazzi knew who he was and how he did what he did. He hated explaining his process to people.

Will slid the photographs out of the envelope and inhaled sharply. The body didn't look like a body at all — it looked like a heart. A human heart, anatomically correct in every way.

Will closed his eyes, heard the beat of his own heart, and imagined the scene.

He imagined the heart standing alone, right on top of the engraved skull, as intended. Seeing it now, Will knows this was Hannibal's work, without a doubt. He left this mutilated corpse for Will, right where he said he would.

"I splintered every bone," Will started, "fractured them. Dynamically. Made you malleable."

Just like Hannibal did to Will, and arguably — just what Will did to Hannibal.

Did you believe you could change me? Like I changed you?

I already did.

Will circled the heart, focusing on the current crime. "I skinned you, bent you, twisted you, and trimmed you. Head, hands, arms and legs." He let out a breathy laugh. "A topiary."

Will stepped closer to the heart and raised a shaking hand to touch it.

"A valentine written on a broken man," he whispered.

The sound of a heart beating grew louder, until Will realized it was coming from inside the man-made heart and not his own. He stepped back, letting his hand fall away, as the heart unfolded into the shape of a skinned, and trimmed, figure.

Out of the holes that once connected to hands and feet grew four hooves. The grotesque, stag-made heart in Will's mind clopped its way towards him, growing familiar shapes out of the hole where the head once was. The shapes blossomed into antlers; huge, curling antlers.

It was a horrid creature, created when Hannibal's valentine turned into a nightmare.

“Will?”

Abigail’s voice pulled him out of the illusion with a loud gasp. Will breathed heavily and blinked, scattering the hellish images in his mind. He scrubbed his face in an effort to compose himself and laughed breathlessly.

“I do feel closer to Hannibal here.”

It was the entire reason why he went to Palermo in the first place, and he felt a terrified kind of joy at getting what he wanted. Well, not quite what he wanted. He felt close to Hannibal, but that wasn’t the same thing as being *with* Hannibal.

Will laughed again, an unhinged sound. “God only knows where I’d be without him.”

He thought back to what he’d just imagined, the images he saw from the crime scene photos. It was Hannibal, there was no doubt. He should be happy at the confirmation (should he be happy about a serial killer leaving him a calling card?) but all he could focus on was the incredible *pain* that resonated from his tableau.

“He left us his…” Will took another deep breath, “His broken heart.”

He looked up at Abigail with haunted eyes full of first- and second-hand pain. She looked confused more than anything, once again leaving Will all the agonizing feelings and taking all the rationality.

“How did he know we were here?”

“He didn’t,” Will exhaled. “But he knew we would come.”

Will had never felt so seen by anybody as he did by Hannibal. It used to bother him, that his strongest bond was with a cannibalistic serial killer. It still did a bit, but he came to accept it.

They understand and accept each other, and that was what really mattered.

“He misses us,” Abigail realized softly.

It’s strange to consider, but the longer Will thought about it, the more honest her words seemed.

“Hannibal follows several trains of thoughts at once without distraction from any,” Will allowed slowly. “One of the trains… is always for his own amusement.”

Will was intimately familiar with this way of thinking. After all, it was how his thoughts worked. Constantly thinking multiple things at once, all those trains crashing into one another in conflict, never knowing which one is going to end up on top. Hannibal’s thought process was more ordered than Will’s, but it was still just as complicated.

“He’s playing with us,” Abigail ventured.

“Always,” Will whispered.

He peered up at Abigail and tried to control his voice, suddenly feeling choked up. “You still want to go with him?”

She looked at him for a second before moving to sit next to him on the altar steps.

“Yes,” she said simply, confirming what Will already felt on the inside.

After everything Hannibal’s done, Will still wanted to go with him. Even though he’s hurt Will horribly, and taunted him, and stabbed him — Will wanted to be with Hannibal.

It was painful to admit, and it made Will afraid of himself.

“He gave you back to me,” he whispered. “Then he took you away. It’s Lucy and the football, he just keeps pulling you away.”

Will held back tears as he said it, grieving for Abigail’s loss and ashamed that not even Abigail’s death was enough for Will to turn away from Hannibal.

Abigail sighed, and Will pushed that line of thinking away. It hurt too much.

“What if no one died?” Will questioned softly. “What if… What if we all left together? Like we were supposed to, after he served the lamb.”

It was a nice dream, one of Will’s favorite “what-ifs” to explore when he couldn’t cope with reality any longer. They would have all left, together, as a family. The only family Will had ever felt a real connection to.

“Where would we have gone?” he wondered, gazing into the shadows of the old Chapel.

He felt Abigail’s pitying concern radiate beside him. “In some other world?”

“In some other world,” Will agreed sadly, turning to look at her again.

“He said he made a place for us,” she repeated, smiling.

It was Will’s turn to feel a surge of pity. “A place was made for you, Abigail. In this world.”

He took a shuddering breath and dropped his eyes to her collarbone, trying to hold back tears. “It was the only place I could make for you.”

She smiled at him sadly, also holding back the tears he felt welling up in his eyes. As Will looked at her, a thin line appeared across her throat and blood spurted out. Her wave of blood unlocked another wave of grief inside Will, and he fought off tears as his mind replayed the memories of when he watched her die, the two of them laying in that great pool of their shared blood on Hannibal's kitchen floor.

The next moment she disappeared, and Will was left alone with his grief.

He doesn't know how long he sat on those church steps, trying to rein in the flood of acute pain. At some point he laid down, stretching out and staring up at the ornate ceiling of the *Cappella.* He thought about many things, but all his thoughts centered around Hannibal.

He was fished out of his mind by Pazzi's voice. "Are you… praying?"

Will kept his eyes trained on the depiction of God above him. "Hannibal doesn't pray. But he believes in God — intimately."

"I wasn't asking Hannibal Lecter," Pazzi responded. He walked up to stand beside where Will was sprawled out.

"I think my prayers would feel constricted by the saints and apostles and Jesus Pantocrator," Will reflected.

He got to his feet. "How do your prayers feel?"

Pazzi considered his answer. "I hope my prayers escaped, flown from here to the open sky, and God."

"Praying you catch him?" Will inquired. "You should be praying he doesn't capture you."

Pazzi turned to face him. “I didn’t head the *Questura di Firenze* for nothing.”

Will hummed and glanced at a gated stairwell near him, to the right side of the sanctuary. “You couldn’t catch him when he was just a kid, what makes you think you’re gonna catch him now?”

Pazzi smiled. “You.”

Will walked over to the stairwell. “What makes you think I *want* to catch him?”

The stairs led down to a large door, candles lit on either side to illuminate the subterranean space with a warm glow.

“*Signor* Graham,” Pazzi murmured from behind him. He said something more in Italian, but Will tuned him out to stare intently at the door leading into the bowels of the ancient church. As he stared, his heart beat faster, and a pool of blood started to seep out under the door.

“If you could possibly be content,” Will whispered in warning, “I would suggest you let *il Mostro* go.”

“I can’t do that any more than you can.”

“He’s gonna kill you, you know.” Will turned to look at him. “I’m usually right about these things.”

“He let you know him. He sent you his heart,” Pazzi emphasized. “Where has he gone now?”

Will smiled. “He hasn’t gone anywhere. He’s still here.”

The catacombs were dark, with only the occasional soft light of a few small candles illuminating the shadows within. Dirt muffled Will's footsteps as he made his way through the maze beneath the church, trying to find his way to Hannibal.

So far, Will only came across the bones of the dead.

He made his way through the passageways slowly, careful to listen for the slightest sounds. Will didn't expect Hannibal to come running up to him, although it would be gratifying. No, he would have to work to find his monster.

He could already hear soft, unhurried footsteps.

"Hannibal!" Will called, his voice echoing in the dark catacombs.

The footsteps paused; but there was no response, and after a breath Will continued his search.

He found Inspector Pazzi in a small alcove with the skeletons of a few early monks. The man was on edge, his gun shaking in his hands where he held it out in front of him.

"You shouldn't be down here," Will warned.

Pazzi spun around with a gasp, saw Will, and lowered his gun with a smile. "I'm not alone. I'm with you."

Will let out a dry laugh and smiled slightly. "You don't know whose side I'm on."

Pazzi stared at him, cautious. "What are you going to do when you find him? Your *il Mostro?*"

Will stared him down a moment before breaking their gaze and searching the tunnels branching out around him, intimately aware that Hannibal could probably hear every word he said.

"I'm… I'm curious about that myself," Will murmured honestly.

Pazzi inhaled. "You and I carry the dead with us, *Signor* Graham. We both need to unburden."

"Why don't you carry your dead back to the Chapel before you count yourself among them?"

Pazzi studied him and his half-smile.

"You are already dead," he accused. "Aren't you?"

Will almost laughed. Oh, how right he was. Will was dead, and on his way to find the Devil.

"*Buonanotte, commendatore.*" Will backed away into the darkness, leaving Pazzi to whatever fate befell him.

He continued to search for Hannibal, moving deeper into the catacombs. The light footsteps had faded, but Will did not lose hope. He walked faster, more desperate to find his monster. He did not think Hannibal had remained in the Norman Chapel for this long only to ignore Will when he came looking. Hannibal felt just as drawn to Will as Will did to him. Their strong, tangled connection went both ways.

For better or for worse.

Finally, Will went deep enough into the maze that the light of the candles started to fade. He did not have a flashlight to continue on, but he knew Hannibal was likely in that darkness.

Hannibal was close.

Will could feel him, as close as he was. He almost imagined he could hear Hannibal's breathing, in rhythm with his own. Will tilted his head back to listen again, but instead words bubbled out of him.

"Hannibal," he called.

All the things he felt when speaking to Abigail earlier, all the emotions swirling inside of him since waking up in the hospital, alone and gutted — it all culminated inside him in that moment, until Will could no longer hold back the words screaming from his heart.

"I forgive you."

Will stood in that near darkness for several minutes, forlornly awaiting a response that would never come.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading :) The next chapter might take longer because I'm busy with school right now, but I'm hoping no more than two weeks!!

Secondo

Chapter Summary

> Will looked back at her over his shoulder. “How ever did you find yourself in this situation?”
>
> She walked down a few more steps to be even with him, so they were now having a face-to-face conversation. “That question applies to both of us.”
>
> Will laughed quietly. “And the answer’s probably the same. What’s your name?”
>
> The woman studied him over the barrel of her rifle. “Chiyoh. How do you know Hannibal?”
>
> “One could argue, intimately,” Will replied with absolutely no hesitation.

Chapter Notes

> There are like 1.5 original, "missing" scenes in this chapter, which combined with everything else that happens in this episode makes this chapter almost 8k! Next chapter will probably be shorter haha, but enjoy this one :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal reclined in his velvet armchair in front of the fireplace, staring at an old stain on the wall. He was thinking about Will, more now than he had consciously allowed himself to do for months.

He had left Antony’s body in the shape of a heart in the Chapel in Palermo for Will, and after seeing him and hearing him Hannibal knew Will understood what he was saying. Will had always understood Hannibal’s feelings through his tableaus.

I gave you a rare gift. But you didn’t want it.

He simply left Will the gift he had given him all those months ago, the gift Will had broken. His heart.

Hannibal had lived eight months without stepping foot in the Norman Chapel. Not because he didn't want to go, because he *did.* He knew Will would be there sometime, searching for him. Hannibal ached to go to him, but he buried that ache deep inside and focused on the pain Will had brought him instead.

Hannibal was too proud to give in that easily. He would not simply run straight to Will, not after he had betrayed him so utterly. No matter what his broken heart wanted.

He spent eight months suppressing his urges, ignoring the pull to Palermo, but then an opportunity presented itself with Antony that Hannibal could not resist.

Now, sitting in his apartment in Florence, he allowed himself to think about Will. He looked healthy, and Hannibal was glad to see him have no difficulty walking, sitting, or standing. It seemed as if the doctors in charge of repairing the damage Hannibal had inflicted had done a good job.

He wondered what Will's scar looked like. How big it was, how jagged. What color it was, how it would feel under Hannibal's hands. Under his tongue.

'Was it nice to see him?" Bedelia's soft voice cut through his melancholy musings.

Hannibal did not look at her but instead continued staring at the stain.

"It was nice," he reflected quietly. "Among other things. He knew where to look for me."

Just like Hannibal hoped he would. He hoped Will would remember what he said to him, all those months ago in front of the fireplace in his office. It was nice to know that Will listened to him, saw him, and predicted him better than anyone else. That ordeal of being known, however, came with a certain amount of longing — and a certain amount of pain.

“You knew where he would look for you,” Bedelia said, pulling Hannibal’s thoughts straight out of his head. She always was a good psychiatrist.

Hannibal supposed this was therapy, once again. Their sessions always included talking about Will, after all.

“He said he forgave me.” Hannibal’s voice shook at the memory.

What emotion caused it to shake, however, was lost in the storm of feelings he was currently experiencing. Pain, sadness, yearning, relief, and grief. It was all there, more emotion than he had felt in years. Hannibal had long since credited Will for making him feel alive, and he was proving it once again.

“Forgiveness is too great and difficult for one person. It requires two: the betrayer, and the betrayed.” Bedelia placed herself within Hannibal’s field of vision, but he continued to avoid her gaze. “Which one are you?”

Hannibal thought about all the things he had put Will through, and all the things Will had put him through. “I’m vague on those details.”

Bedelia paused. “Betrayal and forgiveness are… best seen as something akin to falling in love.”

Hannibal considered her words as another shard of his heart broke off to stab what was left. “You cannot control with respect to whom you fall in love.”

He had never quite denied what was strongly brewing inside, but now Hannibal would admit it freely. To himself, and to others. He had fallen in love with Will Graham, beyond all control.

Hannibal usually hated not being in control. It wasn't something he experienced often. He was used to keeping perfect control over his life, his actions, and his emotions. It was how he remained undiscovered for so long.

Then Will had come along and shattered Hannibal's impeccable control. The love he felt for Will was cosmic, something wild and beyond all power or reason.

Bedelia was silent for a moment, gracefully leaving Hannibal alone with his confession. He knew she was jealous of Will, and although that knowledge usually brought him amusement, he could not find it within himself to be amused right now. His endless yearning for Will was overpowering his usual and careful emotional regulation. Yet another example of how Will caused him to lose control.

"You are going to be caught," Bedelia warned. "It has already been set into motion."

Hannibal blinked through his tears and focused enough on Bedelia to respond. Of course he was going to be caught, *Hannibal* had already set it into motion. He wanted Will to find him. It was the one thing he was determined to control.

He wasn't sure if he would be able to control himself once Will caught him, however.

"Is that concern for your patient or concern for yourself?"

"I'm not concerned about me," Bedelia responded, looking slightly afraid that Hannibal was inquiring as to her motivations. It was almost laughable, that she thought Hannibal was unaware of her reasons for staying with him. Almost.

Bedelia was afraid of him, but she was more curious about him. Hannibal had long since decided that her curiosity was going to get her killed. He was not a man that let people get close to him and escape unscathed. What he did to Will should have warned her of that fact.

Except with Will, Hannibal did not want him to escape. He wanted Will to return to him. It was a silly desire, one that Hannibal could not allow to overpower his self-preservation. However, that internal fight was getting harder to win each passing day.

"I know exactly how I will navigate my way out of whatever it is I've gotten myself into," Bedelia was saying as Hannibal settled his thoughts. "Do you?"

Hannibal glanced at her. "I did."

Bedelia waited for him to say more, but when the silence stretched on and it became clear that he would not elaborate, she sighed.

"Where will Will Graham be looking for you next?" she asked, taking a large sip of wine.

Hannibal stared into the fire. "Someplace I can never go. Home."

Will left his boat docked in Palermo and took the first flight out of the city's small airport to Vilnius, Lithuania.

He only packed as much as he needed for a few days, but made sure to pack his best clothes. He was going to Hannibal's home, trying to understand Hannibal better, and it wouldn't do to be underdressed for such an occasion.

Hannibal would find it rude.

Will spent the entire flight to Hannibal's homeland thinking about what he might find when he arrived. It was a nice change, thinking about the future instead of ruminating on the past. Will liked it, even through his fear.

He wasn't afraid of the future because it was uncertain, like most people were. Constantly imagining what-if scenarios was something Will was accustomed to, but it didn't bring him any anxiety. Many of those future paths were things outside of his control, and as such he didn't let those possibilities bother him. It wouldn't do any good.

Instead, Will was scared of the future that was in his control. He was afraid of his future actions, of what he might do after diving so deep into Hannibal that he couldn't get out. He was afraid that he would give in to that dark pleasure that rippled under his skin every time he considered what Hannibal stood for, and what he offered.

For the very same reason Will was afraid, he was also excited.

It felt like he was split down the middle, but both parts of himself were just that — himself. He couldn't blame Hannibal for his dark side, but he could blame him for his influence in cultivating it.

But, Will was starting to become less bothered by his moral duality. Nobody was all good or all bad, or even neatly split down the middle, and neither was he. He existed in thousands of shades of gray, and it was his free will to decide which shade he was going to act on in any given situation.

What he was really afraid of was acting on a shade that he knew he shouldn't. Morality was fussy that way, but Will clung to it like a lifeline.

When his plane landed in Vilnius, he beelined straight for the car rental counter and managed to get a Jeep. The four-wheel drive would be useful, since he didn't know what awaited him in Aukštaitija. The path to Hannibal's childhood home could be completely overgrown, which Will thought was a real possibility given what he knew about Hannibal's early experiences there.

The Soviet occupation, the loss of his parents. The loss of his sister — Mischa.

The memory of Hannibal speaking her name, opening up about her loss in a rare moment of vulnerability, was seared into Will's mind.

He drove north from Vilnius to the Aukštaitija region. He didn't know exactly where Hannibal's estate was located, but he figured some locals would know. He tried to research the exact location before his flight, but didn't find any conclusive answers. He just knew it was somewhere in the countryside, near the mountains.

Will headed to Kaltanėnai, a small village on the edge of the forest with a population of about 200 people. The town's tavern was a musty little thing squished on the main street, but it was the most lively establishment when Will arrived in the early afternoon, folk music spilling out onto the old cobblestones.

Will sat at the bar, ordered a beer on tap, and got to work.

The people inside the tavern were about what Will expected from an Eastern-European small village. They were hardened, as evidenced by the firm set of their eyes and the calluses on their hands. But they were also joyful, laughter coming easily and music being danced to in the corner of the room. Will got a feeling of determined enjoyment after a hard day's work from them, and his heart grew with pride.

There was one older woman sitting at the bar, a few stools down from Will. She had more wrinkles and lines in her face than anyone else in the tavern, and she was working through glasses of Rye like it was soda. Will liked her.

She also would be the best chance he had at getting information about Lecter Castle. This woman seemed old enough to remember the time before the Soviet occupation, and if she had lived here her whole life, as Will thought was likely, then she would know about the Lecter family. Even if the castle ended up being far away from this little town, the older generation probably remembered the names of their past nobility.

Will got up from his stool near the door and made his way to the free one right next to her.

"English?" he asked while taking a sip from his glass.

She side-eyed him, predictably suspicious of a foreigner talking to her. She nodded but didn't say anything else.

"I'm here on a very important trip researching the history of the old Lithuanian nobility," Will started. "Do you remember the Lecters?"

That got her attention, and her old eyes locked onto his as she turned to face him.

"What do you want to know about them?" she said in heavily accented English.

Will felt a surge of excitement go through him but forced his body to stay calm and casual. "I found records that they had a castle around here, but I'm not sure of the exact location. Do you know where it is?"

She tipped back the rest of her drink with gnarled fingers. "It's a cursed place. You do not want to go there."

Will shrugged. "I'd like to see the grounds, and discover the family crest. There aren't any good depictions of it in the research I've combed through."

The woman snorted. "*Bulšitas.*"

Will blinked. He didn't know Lithuanian, but that word was universal. Bullshit.

"You are no researcher," the woman stated. "You are curious because of the *pabaisa.*"

"*Pabaisa*?" Will asked, eyes narrowed.

“Monster. We may not be as modern as the rest of the world, young man, but we are not stupid. You are not the first person to come through town looking for the castle after the *pabaisa* was discovered.”

Will exhaled. “You’re talking about Hannibal Lecter.”

She nodded, her headscarf brushing the soft fabric of her coat. “It was a surprise to some in town to find out the monster had its nest here, but I knew better. I remember before the war, when the Lecters would visit town for the winter festivals.”

Will leaned closer to her, putting his elbows on the old wooden bar. “What was he like?”

The woman just stared at him with an unimpressed face, like *why should I tell you? Tourist.*

“Please,” Will whispered, swallowing his pride. “I-I knew him. In America.”

The old woman’s eyes widened and she studied him, looking for any sign that he was lying. When she found none, she sighed.

“He was an odd little boy. Serious as a man, more serious than his Papa. I only saw him smile around his sister.”

Will inhaled. “Mischa.”

She nodded sadly. “A tragedy, what happened to that family. Perfect breeding grounds for the *pabaisa* to grow.”

Will imagined Hannibal as a young boy, walking through the narrow streets Will had just explored. It was a picture that made him ache to know more.

“Where is the castle?” Will asked again, softer this time.

The old woman sighed. “Take the main road out of town, north for 10 miles. There is an old road on the left side, almost hidden now. We do not go to that place anymore, and neither should you.”

“Thank you,” Will murmured. “For telling me where it is, and for telling me about him.”

She eyed him then grabbed his glass and drained the liquor in one go.

“You should let the *pabaisa* go,” she warned. “Monsters do not love after they have lost.”

Will found the castle later that evening, when the sun was just starting to descend behind the fog of the clouds. It was on a hill, surrounded by other hills thick with forest. He walked through the overgrowth to get a closer look, the branches seeming to lean towards Will in a threatening way, as if he was a knight fighting his way through to the dragon’s lair.

The castle was crumbling, and after finding all the doors locked Will searched the cemetery. He found Mischa’s grave, and something unexpected. Fresh flowers.

Will retreated back into the forest, deciding to watch the castle, it’s little hunting cottage, and the cemetery at a distance. If anyone was living there or visiting, Will only had to wait to see who it would be. He hoped it would be someone he could talk to about Hannibal, and this place.

In the meantime, he made do with the Hannibal living in his mind palace. He looked just as Will remembered from those last days together before everything blew up, outfit comfortably in a fine suit. He looked so good, so familiar, it made Will’s heart hurt.

“It’s not healing to see your childhood home, but it helps you measure whether you are broken. How and why, assuming you want to know,” Hannibal spoke.

Will imagined them sitting across from each other in the woods, seated in the chairs Hannibal had in his office, now resting on the dry leaves.

“I want to know,” Will replied. He wanted to know everything about Hannibal, to understand him better than anyone else, better than even Will himself had up until now. He wanted to know Hannibal.

“Is this where construction began?” Will wondered.

“On my memory palace?” Hannibal clarified. “Its door is at the center of my mind. And here you are, feeling for the latch.”

Will’s lips twitched on a smile. “The spaces in your mind devoted to your earliest years, are they different from the other rooms?”

He wouldn’t get any answers from this Hannibal, not real ones. But imagining what Hannibal might say was more comforting to Will than not thinking about him at all, and it seemed his subconscious agreed.

“Are they different than this room?” Will said, now imagining them in Hannibal’s old office.

The imagined Hannibal considered. “This room holds sound and motion, great snakes wrestling and heaving in the dark.”

Will wanted to smile again. They were the snakes, fighting in the dark of this room with their games for each other. He did think Hannibal would like reliving his memories here.

Hannibal continued. “Other rooms are static scenes, fragmentary like painted shards of glass.”

Will thought about that. “Everything keyed to memories leading to other memories. Rooms you can’t bring yourself to go. Nothing escapes from them that causes you any comfort.”

“Screams fill some of those places,” Hannibal acknowledged. “But the corridors do not echo screaming, because I hear music.”

Will was brought out of his thoughts about Hannibal’s mind palace by two gunshots fired in the darkening evening light. He followed the sound, and came across a clearing.

There was a woman pheasant hunting. She was young, and of Asian heritage. Will hid before she could see him, and followed her back to the hunting cottage. So she was the one staying here, and taking care of Mischa’s grave.

But who was she? Some sort of caretaker?

Will wasn’t sure, but he was sure as hell going to find out.

Hannibal chipped away at the block of ice on the table, finding himself in a much better mood tonight than in the past few days. Cooking always tended to improve his mood, and he was grateful to have something to distract himself from his constant thoughts of Will.

He was determined to have a good time tonight, in spite of having Professor Sogliato as his guest. Or rather, he was determined to have a good time because of his presence. Hannibal was already happily considering the possible ways in which he would inevitably kill him.

Bedelia seemed to know what he planned and tried to stay out of his way, graciously offering Professor Sogliato some meat before gliding around the table back to her seat.

"The *Studiolo* is a small, fierce group," Hannibal mused as he chipped away at the ice block. "They have ruined a number of academic reputations."

"Appearing before them is a peril," Sogliato said with thinly veiled mockery.

Hannibal smiled. "You were very eager to see me discredited, Professor Sogliato."

Sogliato made a sound of displeasure. "You sang for your supper before the dragons at the *Studiolo.* "

"And you sang very well," Bedelia cut in graciously, obviously trying to diffuse some of the tension.

Sogliato clapped mockingly. "First applause, and then by wet-eyed acclamation the memberships affirmed you as master of the *Palazzo Capponi.*"

Hannibal glanced at him over his busy hands. He wasn't sure if he'd ever met a man so incredibly rude to his dinner hosts before. Hannibal was quite excited to teach Professor Sogliato a lesson in manners. He smiled and finished up the shaved ice drinks.

"Punch Romaine," Hannibal announced, handing glasses to both Bedelia and Sogliato. "A cocktail created by Escoffier. Served to first-class guests on the *Titanic* during their last dinner."

He smiled widely, pleased at the irony of the drink. Bedelia looked displeased, knowing what Hannibal was up to, but he didn't care about her reaction. Sogliato's innocent enjoyment of the cocktail was enough to amuse Hannibal, distracting him from the fresh pain of seeing Will.

“The committees have a new curator,” Sogliato toasted with his Punch Romaine. “They do not miss the old one.”

“If my victory pleased the *professore* I could not tell,” Hannibal said lightly, making his way back to the head of the table where the ice block stood.

“Then you weren’t paying attention,” Sogliato replied coolly.

“I pay lots of attention. Though not in a wide-eyed, indiscriminate way,” Hannibal stated calmly as he swiftly took the ice pick and sank it into Professor Sogliato’s temple with ease.

Sogliato’s eyes widened and he made a few choking sounds, still perfectly alive but completely paralyzed. Bedelia stared at him in horror, somehow not expecting the scene before her.

Hannibal sat down in his seat, picked up a slice of meat, and sighed.

“That may have been impulsive,” he allowed.

Bedelia recovered from her shock. “Been mulling that impulse ever since you decided to serve Punch Romaine.”

Hannibal glanced at her and chewed on his meat. He’d been mulling that impulse for a lot longer, ever since it was created from his desire to distract himself from Will’s predictable appearance and unpredictable forgiveness.

Sogliato started to giggle. “I-I can’t see.”

He muttered some indecipherable Italian through spouts of laughter. Hannibal was thoroughly enjoying the show but Bedelia looked cross. She picked up her napkin, walked around the table, and forcefully pulled the ice pick out of Sogliato's temple.

The Italian man's head immediately thunked onto the table, blood pouring out of his wound and drowning his plate of olives.

"Technically," Hannibal leaned forward, still chewing his food, "You killed him."

Bedelia blinked, looking somewhat concerned about her increased level of participation. She inhaled shakily. "No longer interested in preserving the peace you found here?"

Hannibal regarded her. Her shock at his actions just cemented the fact that she really didn't know him at all.

"You cannot preserve entropy," he explained loudly. "It gradually descends into disorder."

Bedelia was not impressed. "Two men from the *Capponi* are dead."

"I can only claim one," Hannibal reminded, amused. "Technically."

She studied him. "You're drawing them to you, aren't you? All of them."

All of them, indeed. This wouldn't just attract Will, this would attract actual law enforcement, and likely Jack Crawford. The resulting pandemonium would be just the trick to help Hannibal work through the pain he felt from seeing Will again. Hannibal smiled.

He wanted them to come. He was curious what would happen.

Will camped out in the forest, not wanting to leave the vicinity of Lecter Castle. He stared into the small fire he created, thinking about what Hannibal was doing at that moment. Was he still in Palermo, or did he return to Florence? Will sighed. He wasn't supposed to be thinking about Hannibal as he was right now, he was supposed to focus on understanding how he became what he did.

Will's thoughts were interrupted by the snap of a twig, a loud crack in the silence of the forest. He quickly stamped the fire out and turned his flashlight on instead, on high alert for whatever was in the forest with him. Could it be the woman?

Will stalked through the underbrush and the trees before he felt the hair stand up on the back of his neck. Something was watching him.

He turned around and could vaguely make out the distinctive shape of antlers through the mess of tree branches. It seemed the Wendigo was a fitting choice for Will's conflicted subconscious tonight. He couldn't deny the yearning he felt as he gazed upon it, although whether he was yearning for violence or for companionship, Will couldn't say. Those two desires were often too intertwined for him when it came to Hannibal.

Will was suddenly distracted from the eerie Wendigo by the presence of fireflies all around him. The lightning bugs were brighter than those Will remembered from his youth in the South, but they were just as friendly.

There were dozens of them, and as Will watched them he realized that they were all coming from the same direction.

He followed them out of the dark forest and into a courtyard with a fountain covered in ivy. Will hadn't come across this place from his exploration of the grounds earlier, and he was thankful that the fireflies led him to this undiscovered part of Hannibal's childhood home.

He touched his gloved hand to the lichen-covered stone of the old fountain, and traced the outline of a child's hand in old, flaking red paint. Will wondered if it was Hannibal's hand, or Mischa's. His fingers curled on top of the old stone as he thought about the boy Hannibal once was, the monster that had yet to reach full maturity.

With a pang of something in his chest, Will realized that's exactly how Hannibal saw him — a fledgling killer, one made of the same essence as Hannibal, yet entirely unique, with gallons of untapped potential. Except, not quite untapped anymore.

Will rose from the fountain and quietly made his way back to the hunting cabin where he saw the woman. He wasn't getting any sleep tonight, so he may as well do something productive.

He blended into the woods around him and watched her through the window as she prepared one of the pheasants she caught earlier for dinner. However, to Will's surprise, she did not settle down and eat it. Instead, she packed the meat in a bag, grabbed her rifle and a lantern, and headed outside into the night.

Curiosity now piqued, Will wasted no time following her from the shadows towards the castle. She opened a grate around the backside of the towering building, and Will followed silently down some stairs into what seemed to be the castle basement.

He came upon a corridor lit with candles, and found old racks of bottled wine along the sides of the walls. There were live snails on the walls, leaving incandescent slime trails everywhere they went. He stepped forward to get a closer look at his surroundings, and his feet crunched something on the ground. Will bent down to see little bones and empty snail shells scattered everywhere, picking up the one he stepped on. It was brittle, white, and had clearly been down here for a while.

Will was a little confused. Why would there be random snail shells and chicken bones everywhere? If this woman was supposed to be taking care of Hannibal's home, she was doing a very poor job of it. He would not be pleased at this mess.

Suddenly, a deep voice rasped through the silence. Will snapped his flashlight into the direction of the voice, and illuminated a patchwork barrier blocking off the rest of the wine corridor. Will narrowed his eyes and made out iron bars. It looked like a cell.

Will stepped closer and looked through the bars to see a haggard, skinny man reaching out for him and speaking foreign words. He was dirty, unshaven, and barely clothed. He reeked

of excrement and filth. In his hands was the cooked pheasant that Will had seen the woman prepare earlier.

Before Will could make sense of what he was seeing, he heard the sound of a gun cocking behind him.

He turned around slowly, with his hands raised, to see the woman from before standing in front of him, pointing her rifle directly at him.

“You’re upsetting him,” she stated firmly. “You’re trespassing.”

Will did not answer right away. “I’m a friend of Hannibal’s.”

She raised her head slightly. “He sent you?”

“My name is Will Graham,” he said, ignoring her question. “I’m unarmed. Uh, may I lower my arms?”

“This trigger has a three-pound pull. I’m holding two of it.”

The man in the cage behind Will’s back started speaking again, drawing Will’s attention back to the more unexpected presence in the small corridor. “What’s he saying?”

The woman did not lower her gun. “He wants you to look at him, speak to him. But you’re not going to.”

Will studied her. “You’ve cast aside the social graces normally afforded to human beings.”

“He’s cast them aside,” she said with loathing. “All he’s allowed is the sound of water. It’s what the unborn hear. It’s their last memory of peace.”

Will pushed harder. “You’re keeping him like an animal.”

She smiled. “I wouldn’t do this to an animal.”

She gestured with her gun, and Will walked out of the basement and back into the cool night air with his hands up and a gun trained on his back.

“What did he do?” Will asked once they were halfway down the steps that led back to the hunting cabin.

“He ate her,” she replied.

Will stopped walking. “Mischa?”

If that was true, it meant that the man had been a captive for a long time. Will still didn’t know the details, but he knew that Hannibal had lost Mischa when he was still a child himself. If that man back there *ate* her, then…

“How long has he been your prisoner?” Will inquired.

“We have been each other’s prisoner for a very long time,” the woman confirmed.

Will looked back at her over his shoulder. “How ever did you find yourself in this situation?”

She walked down a few more steps to be even with him, so they were now having a face-to-face conversation. “That question applies to both of us.”

Will laughed quietly. “And the answer’s probably the same. What’s your name?”

The woman studied him over the barrel of her rifle. “Chiyoh. How do you know Hannibal?”

“One could argue, intimately,” Will replied with absolutely no hesitation.

“*Nakama?*” she asked. “It’s a Japanese word for very close friends.”

Will held back another laugh. “Friends” didn’t seem like an appropriate label. Even “close friends” didn’t quite cover the intimate connection Hannibal and he shared, but Will didn’t know another word to describe it.

“Yes, we were *nakama*,” he nodded. “Last time I saw him, he, uh…”

Will lowered one of his raised hands to lift his shirt just high enough to show Chiyoh his scar. “He left me with a smile.”

Chiyoh took in the sight of his healed abdominal scar and slowly lowered her gun.

“All sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story.” She stepped closer. “Tell me a story.”

Will nodded, and together the two of them marched back to the hunting cabin. Chiyoh opened the door for him, and Will entered a large living room, more lavish than any hunting cabin he’d ever seen, and decorated in the Japanese style. She gestured to a nearby low-table and Will sat, waiting until Chiyoh returned with tea to break the silence between them.

“We construct fairy tales, and we accept them,” Will began. “Our minds concoct all sorts of fantasies when we don’t want to believe something.”

She considered his words. “I accept what Hannibal has done. I understand why he has done it.”

Will smiled slightly. It appeared as if Chiyoh was well aware of who Hannibal is, and what he has done. He wondered how exactly she knew Hannibal, if she was the caretaker for his estate and even knew about Mischa.

“Mischa doesn’t explain Hannibal,” Will disagreed. “She doesn’t quantify what he does.”

Hannibal was not someone to be broken down into simple childhood trauma, no matter how horrific that trauma may be. He was something altogether different, something *other*. Something like Will.

“He does what was done to her,” Chiyoh pointed out.

Will did not break eye contact with her. “How do you know it was your prisoner who killed Mischa?”

Chiyoh looked down briefly. “Hannibal told me so.”

She glanced back up and met his eyes. “Hannibal took someone from you. Are you here to take someone from him?”

Will was silent for a moment, and poured them both more tea before answering. “If I were like Hannibal, I would’ve killed you already. Cooked you, ate you, and fed what was left of you to him. That’s what he would do.”

Chiyoh did not appear frightened by his statement. If anything, she looked amused. “You’ve given that some thought.”

Will didn't dignify that with an answer. Of course he'd given that some thought. All his thoughts now revolved around Hannibal. No matter what he tried, he couldn't get the man out of his head. After everything that's happened, Will wasn't sure he wanted Hannibal out of his head. Not yet.

"Do you know where he is?" Will asked, changing the subject.

"Why are you looking for him, after he left you." Chiyoh's eyes flicked down to Will's stomach. "With a smile."

Will's hand unconsciously went to press against his scar through his shirt and he thought about the answer, more than he'd allowed himself to think about it before. He knew he wanted to find Hannibal, but the reason behind that…

"I've never known myself as well as I know myself when I'm with him," Will whispered.

Chiyoh looked away.

"You won't find Hannibal here," she finally replied. "There are places on these grounds he cannot safely go. Bad memories."

Will knew that. It's why he came here in the first place, to break through the barriers in Hannibal's mind, to truly see all of him. Will wanted to know him completely, just as Hannibal knew him.

"What do these grounds hold for you?" Will wondered.

"Hannibal wanted to kill that man for what he did to Mischa. I wouldn't let him take his life, so Hannibal left his life with me."

Will wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. “He was curious if you would kill. I imagine he still is.”

It was a sentiment Will was familiar with. *Intimately.*

Hannibal knelt behind the copper tub, carefully massaging shampoo into his companion’s wet hair. Dinner with one of his coworkers at the *Palazzo* and his wife had gone spectacularly well. Hannibal was in good spirits after watching them unknowingly feed on the remnants of Sogliato.

“What were you like as a young man?” Bedelia inquired softly.

Hannibal did not take offense to this question. His past was hanging over both of them as of late, ever since he confided in her that Will had returned to his childhood home. He found himself reflecting on that time in his life more than he had in years, and could tell that Bedelia was incredibly curious about it.

“I was rooting for Mephistopheles and contemptuous of Faust,” Hannibal replied with a small smile.

Bedelia digested that before speaking again. “Would you like to talk about your first spring lamb?”

Hannibal kept lathering her hair, hands moving in slow, circular motions. “Would you?”

Bedelia chose to ignore his warning. “Why can’t you go home, Hannibal? What happened to you there?”

Images threatened to break through the thickest iron doors of Hannibal's mind palace, but he kept them back.

"Nothing happened to me," he said, simply but firmly. "*I* happened."

There was silence for a moment, only the soft sound of soap suds moving against each other. Then, Bedelia spoke for the final time.

"How did your sister taste?" she whispered.

Hannibal's hands stilled and his sharp eyes flicked to Bedelia's face, but she was already sinking into the tub, water obscuring her features until the whole of her disappeared under the surface.

Hannibal straightened up, dried his hands off, and walked into the large bedroom that was once meant to be his and Will's.

After his conversation with Chiyoh, Will declined her offer for a warm bed and ventured back into the woods outside. He had always been more comfortable with nature than with people, and besides. He had a design to test.

Will wasn't entirely sure what he wanted to accomplish as he took the prisoner out of his cage and freed him in the woods behind the castle. Part of him was fine if the man decided to run away, but a larger part of him, the part well-educated on the psychology of captives, knew that such an outcome would be incredibly unlikely. This same part of Will was the part that was blurring with Hannibal.

The part that was curious what would happen.

As Will waited in the dark outside the entrance to the castle basement, he knew he couldn't blame his actions on Hannibal, no matter how blurred the two of them were. As Bedelia once said, what Hannibal does is not coercion. It is persuasion.

The Hannibal created by Will's subconscious materialized then, clad in a crisp suit he often wore to their therapy sessions. Will leaned back against a tree, and resigned himself rather enthusiastically to a discussion with this version of Hannibal.

"Are we blurring together, Will?" he wondered. "Or is it that you are cultivating your instincts, the dark ones that are summoned by my own darkness that still resides in this place?"

His words remind Will of something Hannibal said to him once, when the veil between them had first been thinned.

If you followed the urges you kept down for so long, cultivated them as the inspirations they are, then you would become someone other than yourself.

"I feel closer to you here," Will said quietly. "I haven't quite decided yet if I like that or not."

"You haven't decided a lot of things," Hannibal observes. "But is that what you really came here for?"

Will's gaze is drawn off Hannibal towards the light of the hunting cabin door opening and closing. He watched as Chiyoh headed down to the basement, completely ignorant of what she was about to find.

"No," Will replied. "It's not."

I came here for you, he thought as he watched Chiyoh descend the steps into the dark.

He didn't follow, content to let things play out naturally. He didn't manipulate a lot, just enough to increase his chances for the targeted result. He knew it was something Hannibal would do, and he felt a bit of resentment about it, but more than anything he felt good. He felt closer to Hannibal with his actions, which brought him pleasure, but on top of that he felt *good*. A quiet thrum of power, punctuated by Chiyoh's scream of horror.

Will left Hannibal in the woods of his childhood home, and entered the basement to find Chiyoh huddled in the corner. The skeletal body of her prisoner was on the ground in front of her, blood leaking out from a fresh wound on his neck. He was obviously dead.

"You did this," Chiyoh accused softly, staring at the man's body. "You set him free."

"It was you I wanted to set free," Will said, walking towards her.

Chiyoh blinked. "You said Hannibal was curious if I would kill." She turned her head to look Will in the eyes. "You were curious too."

"I didn't want this," he denied half-heartedly.

"Yes you did," Chiyoh scoffed. "You were doing what he does. He'd be proud of you. His *nakama*," she finished mockingly.

Will felt warmth swell in his chest at her words. Hannibal's pride, much like the rest of him, was an addiction.

"Did you know?" Will asked, turning the focus back on her. "At some level… you knew."

He studied her, stiff with shock at what she's done and anger at Will for orchestrating it. He took one of the dusty bottles of wine from the racks, pulled the cork out with his knife, and offered it to her.

“He created a story out of events that only he experienced,” Will said. It was so obvious that Hannibal had lied to her, curious what Chiyoh would do, that Will wondered how she did not see it. Denial was a powerful drug, but Will preferred to think that he was the only one who knew Hannibal so well as to see the true meaning behind all his actions. He felt weirdly possessive over the privilege his empathy bestowed upon him — the privilege to see Hannibal.

I let you know me. See me.

Will took a deep breath and repeated her words from earlier. “All sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story.”

Chiyoh took a sip of the wine. “For Mischa,” she whispered with tears on her face.

She glanced at the body of her prisoner one last time before standing up and taking hold of her rifle. She passed Will on her way out of the basement, pausing for a moment before heading up the steps.

“‘I’ll help you find him.”

Will frowned, once again curious. “Why would you help me?”

Chiyoh fixed him with an unimpressed stare. “I have no reason to stay here. Not anymore. You saw to that.”

She departed, and Will was left alone with the body of a man Hannibal left years ago for Chiyoh to kill. The longer he stared at it, the more vividly a picture formed in his mind.

Will’s eyes found the old, green bottles of wine and he thought of the fireflies outside. They were beautiful, and he wanted to transform this unworthy man into something beautiful. It was something Hannibal would do, but more importantly it was something Will *wanted* to do.

He thought about how he honored Randall Tier by displaying him as the creature he was, and thought he would do something similar to this man. If Hannibal's design was to humiliate his victims by elevating them to a level of beauty they were not deserving of, Will's design was to honor his victims by transforming them into their true selves.

He started by smashing all the bottles of wine he could find and assembling them into large, glittering wings. The sight of them made him breathless, and he finally turned to the body.

He took his time, uncaring that Chiyoh was waiting for him. She needed time to process what just happened, and Will needed time to build his monument.

There was enough rope lying around in the basement for Will to fully wrap the prisoner's body like a mummy. He attached the wings to the back and tied a thick rope around the entire thing, intending to hoist it up high into the open air where the basement stairs first meet the candle-lit corridor leading to the cell. Before he could do so, however, he paused.

Something was missing.

Will looked around and his eyes caught on the glistening slime trail of the snails. As he glanced around, he discovered that in fact the place was crawling with them. He thought about Hannibal's appetite and smiled. The snails would make the perfect final addition to his design.

Will spent a fair amount of time collecting snails and placing them onto the wrapped body, but it didn't feel like a chore. On the contrary, Will felt like he was doing something divine. He was using Hannibal's materials to make his own unique tableau, in the place Hannibal first became.

When he was finally satisfied, he pulled on the rope with effort and lifted his firefly into the air. The dozens of live snails decorating the body were content to devour their perch, their movements adding life to Will's display of death. Will grunted with effort as he made the glass wings spread out behind the body, glittering in the candlelight.

He tied the rope to an iron sconce and stepped forward to take in the full picture of his creation.

He intended it to be a firefly, but the longer Will gazed at it the more he saw the image of a moth, emerging from its chrysalis as something different than what it was before.

I can feed the caterpillar and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.

Will thought it was fitting, making a monument to Hannibal reflecting both his childhood in this place and Will's becoming. As he transformed the prisoner, Hannibal had transformed him. With this tableau, Will was telling Hannibal he understood. He understood, and he no longer differentiated what parts of himself were Hannibal and what parts of himself were him. There was still much to work through, but Will accepted Hannibal. Perhaps more important, he was beginning to accept himself.

"Your designs are always beautiful to behold, Will," Hannibal's voice echoed softly behind him.

"You probably won't ever see this," Will whispered.

"If I did," Hannibal assured him, "I would be so proud of you."

Will turned to meet his gaze and smiled faintly. Without saying anything more, Will walked out of the bowels of Lecter Castle to meet Chiyoh outside. He did not have to chase after Hannibal's ghost any longer, now that he was ready to find the real thing.

"What your sister made you feel," Bedelia started, standing with her arms crossed. "Was beyond your conscious ability to control or predict."

“Or negotiate,” Hannibal added lightly. He was seated at the grand piano in their apartment, which served to create beautiful music. In spite of this, Hannibal could not help but miss his harpsichord. It would have made this impromptu therapy session much more bearable.

“I would suggest,” Bedelia continued, “what Will Graham makes you feel is not dissimilar. A force of mind and circumstance.”

Hannibal’s hands flew lightly over the keys, playing one of the many melodies he had memorized. Bedelia was quite right, as she often was nowadays when it came to his emotions.

“Love,” Hannibal supplied. He thought of his feelings for past Mischa and his current feelings for Will, and smiled. “He pays you a visit or he doesn’t.”

“Same with forgiveness,” Bedelia replied seriously, not matching his smile. “And I would argue, the same with betrayal.”

Hannibal’s eyes stayed focused on his playing but he inclined his head to indicate his agreement. “The god Betrayal. Who presupposes the god Forgiveness.”

The two concepts were gods, at least to Hannibal and Will. They were uncontrollable and unpredictable, much like Will and Hannibal’s betrayal and forgiveness for each other.

“We can all betray,” Bedelia said softly. “Sometimes we have no other choice.”

Hannibal raised his eyes to burn into Bedelia’s. “Mischa didn’t betray me. She influenced me to betray myself, but I forgave her that influence.”

Much like Will Graham, indeed.

Bedelia was silent for a moment.

“If past behavior is an indicator of future behavior,” she said slowly, “there is only one way you will forgive Will Graham.”

Hannibal thought back to his sister. She was a carefree, happy child, so full of joy that Hannibal could not control the love that blossomed within him as a result. Will was different from Mischa in many ways, but the love he inspired within Hannibal was the same.

Bedelia was referring to consumption, but the two cases weren’t quite the same. Hannibal did not kill Mischa before he ate her, but he would kill Will if he decided to do what Bedelia was suggesting. He did not know if he was quite ready to take that step, or even if he could.

However, from the way things were going now Hannibal had to admit that Bedelia had a point. He had never been able to entirely predict Will, and he was worried that Will would choose to kill him after he learned of Hannibal’s childhood in Lithuania rather than join him. If that was the case, Hannibal did not see any other choice than the one Bedelia was suggesting. He did not want to live without Will, and this might be the only way to have him and forgive him in the same bite.

Hannibal finished the piano piece with a flourish and looked up, decided.

“I have to eat him.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Your comments always bring a smile to my face :)

Contorno

Chapter Summary

> Will washed his wounds with antiseptic, grimacing, and carefully dabbed antibiotic cream on them afterwards. He ignored the rest of the first-aid kit, though. He wasn't about to put bandaids on his entire face, and it was probably better to let the wounds breathe, anyway. He wondered if Hannibal would have cleaned him up differently, if his practiced doctor's hands would be purely clinical as they patched up his injuries or if they would touch with reverence.
>
> Will remembered how Hannibal touched him after Randall Tier, how he bandaged Will's hands with care. Will had never been touched so gently before, like he was worthy of being cherished.

Chapter Notes

> This was a fun chapter to do, since Hannibal and Will both get injured hahahaha
>
> Lots of the usual introspection and missing scenes, hope you enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day, Chiyoh and Will boarded a train in Vilnius headed towards Italy. Will bought the tickets to Florence, and Chiyoh stood beside him at the ticket line, silent. She said she would help Will find Hannibal, but truthfully Will did not need much help, only confirmation. Her silence was confirmation enough.

They settled in one of the many cabins in the train that were outfitted for overnight, long-distance travel. A small room, with bunk beds and a table and chairs connected to the wall. Will had never been on a train before, let alone an old-fashioned, European one. It was the easiest way to travel, but Will was not taking stock of this new experience as much as he was imagining how his reunion with Hannibal would go.

Chiyoh probably sensed that his thoughts were preoccupied with the future, and broke the tranquility between them with tales of the past.

“On still evenings,” she reminisced, “when the air was damp after a rain, we played a game.”

Will stared out the window at the countryside passing by, and Chiyoh continued. “Hannibal would burn all kinds of barks and incense for me to identify by scent alone.”

Will could imagine it. Hannibal had an exceptional nose, one that had sniffed out both his aftershave and his encephalitis. He was tempted to ask Chiyoh who won the game, but he already knew the answer.

“He was charming,” she mused, “The way a cub is charming. A small cub that grows up to be one of the big cats.”

Will thought back to the old woman in the village in Aukštaitija, who compared Hannibal to a small monster who grew into its full potential. Comparing Hannibal to a cat was not much different, and in many ways accounted for his traits that could not be defined by the monster. Cunning, selfish, and finicky.

“One you can’t play with later,” Will murmured. The more he thought about it, the more ironic it was. He had always been more of a dog person.

Chiyoh met his gaze and seemed to want to say something, but sighed and leaned back into her seat.

“The day I met Hannibal,” she said, choosing another memory, “he was an orphan. I was meant to meet him with his sister, but he was alone.”

Will frowned, imagining a young boy on the cusp of his teenage years, wracked with grief and trauma. He wondered how long Hannibal had been alone, after losing Mischa. If there was anyone else who he felt such emotion for, anyone who would have eased his burden, or

if Hannibal had to cope on his own, drawing from the monster's strength. Will was afraid to know the answer.

"How did you meet him?" he asked instead. He was dying to know how Chiyoh and Hannibal were connected, if only to satisfy his own jealousy. Will was jealous that Chiyoh knew things about Hannibal that he didn't.

"I was his aunt's attendant. My parents sent me to learn from Lady Murasaki when I was just a girl," Chiyoh answered softly.

That was new information. Will hadn't heard of any family Hannibal had other than his sister, and perhaps that was because he hadn't bonded with any of them except Mischa. It was apparent, however, that after his immediate family died, Hannibal had gone to live with his aunt and uncle, which afforded him a sort-of cousin, Chiyoh.

Will understood now. Chiyoh was family, and family protects family. Will tried not to think of his own family, with Abigail, that he and Hannibal had destroyed together.

"I learned from Hannibal, too," Chiyoh reflected.

Will nodded. He had, as well. "He comes in the guise of a mentor, but it's distress that excites him."

Chiyoh glared. "I'm not in distress."

"Not anymore," Will said lightly. His mind wandered to the firefly tableau that he left behind in Hannibal's childhood home. "You had a strict rule about taking life, and you broke it."

He studied her, and thought back to when Hannibal had first pushed him to take a life. It had been Randall Tier's, and Will had not regretted it. "Is it on your mind? Do you see yourself killing him over and over?"

He asked because he was curious what the answer would be, if it would be the same as his own.

"No. I see you."

Will smiled.

"How do you know Hannibal's in Florence?" Chiyoh asked, changing the subject.

Will took a postcard out of his pocket and placed it on the table between them. "Botticelli."

The postcard was of *la Primavera*, the painting which Pazzi told him Hannibal had first recreated as *il Mostro*. He bought the postcard in the Palermo airport right before getting on the plane for Lithuania. He couldn't resist carrying around a physical reminder of where Hannibal was, and Will found himself spending most of his free time up until then gazing at the painting, trying to look at it through Hannibal's eyes.

It was truly beautiful, and just the type of art Hannibal wouldn't be able to resist revisiting.

Chiyoh regarded the postcard with minimal interest. "I've never been to Italy. I never expected to."

Will said nothing. He never expected his life to turn out the way it had, either. He thought back to himself as a young man, 22 years old and fresh out of the NOPD training academy. That version of himself never would have expected to visit Europe, or even to visit Baltimore. He thought he was going to be a NOLA cop his entire life, maybe get lucky and settle down with someone who understood him, but his life had taken many twists and turns.

Hannibal was the one who truly understood Will, and had provided him with many opportunities he never thought he would have.

He was pulled out of his thoughts by Chiyoh speaking again. “Birds eat thousands of snails every day. Some of those snails survive digestion and emerge to find they’ve traveled the world.”

Will hated to be compared to a snail, but couldn’t deny that Chiyoh was right. He had survived what Hannibal put him through, and found himself a different person in a different place.

“In the belly of the beast,” Will agreed.

Hannibal strolled through the Boboli Gardens in the late afternoon sun, pleased that he finished his work at the *Palazzo* in time to visit the gardens while the sun still hung above the horizon. He had refrained from visiting his favorite places in Florence because they reminded him that Will was not here for Hannibal to show them to him, but he broke his self-imposed rule today.

He wanted to visit the gardens, alone, because he needed to think about Will.

Will was in Lithuania right now, but he would return to Hannibal soon. Hannibal’s skin crawled imagining Will in that dreaded place, but he understood why Will wanted to visit. He understood Will better than anyone.

Hannibal did not want to focus on what Will was discovering at his home and instead focused on what might happen when he returned. *When*, not if, because Hannibal knew that Will would come back to him.

He hoped that Will would always come back to him.

When he did come back, this time, Hannibal needed to be ready. There were so many possibilities that Hannibal could predict occurring, but there were also possibilities that he had no way of preparing for. He had never been able to entirely predict Will, but he was going to do his best in preparing for what Hannibal saw were the most likely scenarios.

The first, obviously, would be that Will was coming to kill Hannibal. He might have seen too much of Hannibal in Lithuania, not liked what he saw, and combined with the rest of the pain Hannibal had put him through finally decided to put an end to things once and for all and kill Hannibal. This possibility was not new, as Will had tried to kill him before in the past, but their last meeting had raised a certain level of doubt in this future path.

Not your life, Will had said as he laid in a pool of his own blood on Hannibal's kitchen floor.

Somewhere, in all the time Will had tried to trap him, he had changed his mind about wanting to kill Hannibal. He was truly a beautiful creature, being able to change so much and yet not change his essence.

Although Will had changed his mind about killing Hannibal before he betrayed him, Hannibal knew it was quite possible that Will had changed his mind again. Indeed, he would even expect it after he slit Abigail's throat in front of him and left them both for the authorities to find.

Except, Will had tracked him down in Palermo and whispered the words Hannibal had been aching to hear for months.

I forgive you.

Hannibal did not go to Will when he spoke those sacred words, although he wanted to. He wondered what forgiveness meant to Will, and if it would include violence.

If it did, then Hannibal would be prepared. Will's murderous intentions had never been anything other than attractive to Hannibal, and he was excited to see what Will had in store for him.

Hannibal leisurely walked through Boboli Gardens, meticulously planning out every possible scenario, but smiling because he knew, inevitably, that Will would surprise him.

Will got ready for bed and climbed in the top bunk. It was quite small, but he figured that's normal for sleeping on a train. He'd never done it before, and was unsure if he *could* sleep over the rhythmic motion and sound of the train speeding down the tracks.

Will was no stranger to sleepless nights, however. Between insomnia and nightmares, he hadn't been getting enough sleep for years. He wondered what, if anything, would change that.

Chiyoh returned from the tiny bathroom that moment, slipping into bed underneath Will's bunk with the grace of a cat. Will continued to stare at the ceiling of the train compartment, tucked into his covers.

"Are we obligated to talk?" Chiyoh inquired.

Will did not move a muscle, not even to blink. "No."

"Strange to talk so much," Chiyoh said, ignoring him. "Not used to hearing voices outside my own head."

Will held back a groan. He didn't really want to talk. Unlike Chiyoh, he was content with only hearing the voices inside his own head.

"I hear voices from all directions," Will muttered. The ones outside his own head were the unwelcome ones, usually.

Will tried to focus on something else, and found himself still curious about Chiyoh. She was Hannibal's family, but just how similar to him was she? Not too much, if she was so against the demise of her prisoner and so shaken up from killing him.

"At the gnawing sameness of your days, did you look at the shape of things?" Will questioned. "At what you were becoming?"

He had to ask. He had to know if someone out there was experiencing something similar to himself. Will spent hours upon hours trying to make sense of the mess inside himself, to understand what he was becoming. Frankly, he was afraid of becoming what Hannibal wanted. Partly from the nature of that becoming, but partly out of spite. He did not want to be what Hannibal wanted him to be.

It was getting harder and harder for Will to hold onto that fear.

"I wasn't becoming anything," Chiyoh exhaled. "I was standing still, exactly where he left me standing. Like taxidermy."

Will could relate to that. "Hollowed out, and filled with something else."

"Not something else," Chiyoh disagreed. "I'm not as malleable as you are."

Will didn't know if he should be proud or sad at that. Sad because, once again, he was alone in his experiences. Loneliness was no stranger to Will, but he still felt its sting. If he thought he could relate to Chiyoh and find a camaraderie in their shared experiences, he was wrong.

Hannibal would be proud of Will's differences, and exalt him for being so unique. Feelings weren't something Will could choose, but if he could, he wondered if he wouldn't choose to be proud of his differences. For once, it might be nice to feel proud of how unique he was. He was so tired of being looked at differently for his empathy, and so tired of being ashamed of his propensity for violence.

But being proud of himself would mean accepting himself, and Will wasn't sure if he was ready to do that. He didn't know what *self* he was becoming.

"I was violent," Chiyoh reflected quietly, "when it was the right thing to do. But… I think you like it."

Will closed his eyes.

"Hannibal and I…" Will whispered, "afforded each other an experience we may not otherwise have had."

They changed each other. Both Hannibal and Will had gone through many experiences in their lives, but it was only the experiences with each other that rocked them both, to their cores. The things they put each other through were dramatic, but they were also novel. If one thing stuck with Will from his psychology degree, it was that novelty excited people.

"If you don't kill him, you're afraid you're going to become him," Chiyoh observed.

Will opened his eyes. "Yes."

Will used to be afraid all the time. Two years ago, he was deathly afraid of getting into killers' heads because he was afraid he couldn't shake them off. Then the encephalitis, and Hannibal, happened and Will was afraid he was losing his mind. That's probably the most afraid he'd ever been.

Once he found out the truth about Hannibal, that fear went away. Although he knew what Hannibal was, Will was never truly afraid of him. He wasn't scared that Hannibal would kill him, because he was so consumed by wrath and determined to kill him first.

Now, that rage and fear had faded. Will was no longer afraid of living in other killers' heads, because he was already living in the worst one of all. Somehow, Hannibal's mindset was more calming than horrifying. Will noticed the difference when compared to those other

killers, and couldn't decide if it was due to desensitization or Hannibal. He supposed he'd always thought the Ripper's kills were more meaningful, more beautiful, than any other killer's.

Will was only afraid of one thing, ever since waking up at the hospital with his stomach stitched back together. He wasn't afraid he would die. He wasn't afraid he wouldn't find Hannibal.

He was afraid that the feelings he started to listen to after his release from prison would overcome everything else he was feeling. He was afraid that he would *become*, just like Hannibal wanted him to.

"There are means of influence other than violence," Chiyoh emphasized.

Will's brow furrowed. What did she mean by that?

She was trying to be at least a little helpful, or else she wouldn't have spoken at all after Will admitted his only fear. She was giving him a hint, some little strategy that Will could utilize if he wanted to fight his fear and thus, fight Hannibal.

Will wasn't sure what she was referring to, though. Violence was the only language Hannibal spoke.

Wasn't it?

Chiyoh turned off the lights in the resounding silence and Will stared at the dark ceiling for a long time, trying to figure out what she was telling him, before he finally succumbed to sleep.

Hannibal bent over the ancient sculpture with care, delicately dusting its smooth surface in an attempt to improve the stone's quality. He worked slowly, intently focused on his work so he wouldn't damage the priceless artifact. It was a beautiful piece, one worthy of the utmost care.

"Dr. Fell?" A voice behind him inquired, interrupting his concentration.

"Yes?" Hannibal answered, still bent over the statue.

"I am Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi from the *Questura di Firenze*."

Hannibal's eyebrows raised at that. The name rang a bell somewhere in his mind, and if this man was *Questura...*

"I was wondering if you ever met your predecessor?" Pazzi questioned.

Hannibal breathed once, then straightened up. "Never met him. Read several of his monographs."

He turned his face towards Pazzi and made eye contact. Hannibal was careful not to let his recognition of the other man show on his face, but Pazzi was not as shuttered. Hannibal clearly saw the surprise flash in his eyes, the recognition changing his face. It seemed Pazzi really was the young officer who had been on his tail 20 years ago, when Hannibal first visited Florence. When he first became a man.

Hannibal turned back to his workbench, casual and relaxed if not a bit annoyed. If he remembered correctly, this man was the only member of law enforcement who had seen his face, at the Uffizi Gallery. By the time he took his suspicions back to the *Questura*, Hannibal was long gone and had framed another man for his work. This man, Pazzi, was all that remained of Hannibal's time as *il Mostro*. He was the last loose end.

Pazzi recovered from his obvious shock and tried to make his way casually towards Hannibal. “The officers who first investigated checked the *Palazzo* for any sort of note — farewell notes, suicide notes — found nothing.”

“The going assumption is, he eloped with a woman. And her money,” Hannibal smiled, effortlessly shifting into the role of a charming professor.

Pazzi blinked then laughed a bit too much.

“What is the going assumption regarding Professor Sogliato?” he asked, overly friendly.

Hannibal was silent as he turned to fully face Pazzi. “Still no word?”

“You may have had the last words with Sogliato,” Pazzi said. Hannibal held back a smile at the man’s veiled statements.

“Your colleague, *Signor* Albizzi, tells me no one has spoken to Professor Sogliato since he declined your invitation to dinner,” Pazzi continued casually. “He is the second to have disappeared from the *Palazzo*.”

Pazzi’s smile was so fake Hannibal wanted to peel it off him.

“Like any good investigator, I’m sure you’re sifting the circumstances for profit,” Hannibal replied with feigned thoughtfulness.

Pazzi nodded, his eyes boring into Hannibal. “Both were bachelors, well-respected scholars with orderly lives. They had some savings, nothing much.”

Hannibal said nothing, and a self-satisfied grin appeared on Pazzi’s face as he turned to leave.

“*Commendatore* Pazzi?” Hannibal called lightly.

Pazzi stopped. “Yes?”

“I think you are a Pazzi of *the* Pazzi, am I correct?” Hannibal inquired.

Pazzi looked over his shoulder with eyes narrowed. “How did you know that?”

Hannibal smiled. “You resemble a figure from the Della Robbia roundels in your family’s chapel at Santa Croce.”

Pazzi relaxed slightly. “Yeah, yeah. That was Andrea de Pazzi depicted as John the Baptist.”

“Then there’s the most famous Pazzi of all: Francesco,” Hannibal mused. “He attempted to assassinate Lorenzo the Magnificent in the cathedral at Mass, in 1478.”

He was perfectly polite, but he wanted to feed Pazzi a little hint. It was amusing to warn the Inspector this way, by reminding him of what fate befell his ancestor. Pazzi had to know that Francesco was hanged for his crimes, and was smart enough to recognize the threat. Hannibal was turning the interrogation back on him, and making it clear that he was not a simple suspect, or even a simple killer. He was on equal footing with Pazzi, or rather reminding him that out of the two of them, Hannibal held all the power.

“Yeah,” Pazzi nodded, the fake smile back. “The Pazzi family were all brought low on that Sunday.”

Pazzi glanced around at the antique sculptures for a moment before walking back to Hannibal. “If you come upon anything, Dr. Fell, anything personal from the missing men, will you call me?”

“Of course, *Commendatore*,” Hannibal reassured.

The two men maintained eye contact a second more, then Pazzi nodded once and turned away, leaving Hannibal alone with his thoughts.

Hannibal would kill this man. Not because he had to in order to contain Pazzi's recognition, but because Hannibal wanted to. He wanted to kill the only loose end left from his time as *il Mostro*. Pazzi would certainly go after the Verger bounty on Hannibal as well, and he would have to kill him as repayment for that. He was looking forward to Pazzi's inevitable demise.

Hannibal returned to the piece of art he was working on before, carefully brushing dirt away from the surface while pondering the different methods in which he could kill and display Pazzi.

Will's face twitched as a drop of something wet hit his cheek. He opened his eyes blearily, blinking a few times to focus his vision on what was in front of him. Or rather, what was above him.

Chiyoh was suspended on the ceiling above Will's little bunk bed, impaled on a forest of antlers and hand hanging down limp like she was reaching out to him for help. Her eyes were wide open, as was her mouth in a silent scream. Will stared at her and watched her blood drip down, feeling its warmth as it splashed on his skin.

Will woke up relaxed, the cabin still dark. He checked the ceiling above him but there was no remnant of his dream, and when he checked the bunk below his own there was also no trace of Chiyoh.

He swung out of bed and shrugged into his slippers and heavy coat. As he slid out of his room and stalked down the hallway in search of his companion, he stuck his hands in his coat pockets and discovered his wallet that he had forgotten to take out the night before.

He reached the end of the train and could see Chiyoh standing out on the platform, her silk nightgown glistening like water in the dim lights. He watched her for a moment, then reached

for the doorknob and let himself out into the cold night to join her in contemplation.

The wind whipped at Will's skin as he made himself comfortable next to her, watching the tracks speed behind the moving train. At this time of night, the darkness and the wind interacted with the moving tracks to make Will feel like he was flying.

"I like the night," Chiyoh revealed. "It's more than a period of time; it's another place. It's different from where we are during the day."

"We're different from who we are during the day," Will responded. "Little more hidden, little less seen."

Usually. That wasn't the case with Hannibal. Will thought he would see him blind, from the way his breaths came and his feet struck the earth. He would know Hannibal in death, at the end of the world. The night could not obfuscate what was seen in Will's heart.

"When life is most like a dream," Chiyoh smiled.

Will looked at her then. "Why are you searching for him?" He studied her. "What are you hoping to find?"

Her smile was a small, private thing. "I'm not searching for Hannibal." She turned to look straight at Will. "I know exactly where he is."

Will's breath hitched. "Is he in Florence?"

He needed that confirmation, to know if he was on the right path to Hannibal or if his instincts were completely wrong. It was an unlikely possibility, but one that Will was deathly afraid of because it implied that he didn't know Hannibal as well as he thought he did.

Will was 99% sure Hannibal was in Florence, but Chiyoh hadn't said anything to confirm or deny that fact. If she knew, then she could tell Will and he would know for sure. The certainty of knowing Hannibal's location was an opportunity that Will couldn't pass up.

"Yes," Chiyoh said simply, and Will exhaled in relief.

But with the relief, Will was also confused. "Why didn't you tell me you knew?"

"I told you…" Chiyoh started, moving closer to Will so that they were inches apart. "There are means of influence other than violence."

Will's eyebrows raised in surprise as she leaned in to kiss him, but he did nothing to stop her. The kiss was light, devoid of passion but still sweet. Chiyoh leaned back after a few moments, speaking so that her words brushed upon Will's lips.

"But violence is all you understand."

Before Will could move a muscle, Chiyoh reached out and shoved Will violently, pushing him over the railing, off the train, and onto the tracks below.

Will gasped as he was flung off the train into the air, and grunted in pain when he hit the ground hard. His face landed on a wooden rung, whiting out his vision, and his body ached in agony. Will lay there for a while, completely dazed and swimming in pain, before something nudged his head and his entire body twitched.

Will groaned and tested out his aching body, finding everything hurting but nothing quite broken or sprained. He staggered to his feet and blinked the blood from his eyes, panting with exertion. As his vision stabilized, Will saw the ravenstag walking on the tracks ahead of him, leading the way.

Will followed after it, limping and in his pajamas, but determined to get to Florence any way he could.

He walked slowly along for what seemed like hours, following the tracks and the ravenstag. Eventually the tracks crossed a main road, and Will raised his hand to shield his eyes from the headlights of an approaching car.

The car pulled alongside him and Will lowered his arm, blinking the spots away from his vision to see a man frowning at him from his open window.

"*Co děláš bloudění po venkově uprostřed noci?*"

Will had no idea what the man said, and didn't even know which language he was speaking. The man sighed at his blank expression.

"English?" he asked in a heavy accent.

"Y-Yeah," Will replied, voice like gravel.

"I said, what are you doing wandering around countryside in middle of night?"

Will finally focused on the man's face, seeing hard lines and sharp, but concerned, eyes.

"I…" Will floundered for an adequate excuse before his head pounded and he thought *fuck it.* "I got pushed off a train. Headed to Florence."

The man gaped at him. "Long way from Florence." He searched Will and apparently wasn't concerned with whatever he found, because he leaned over to push open the passenger side door. "Come."

Will stared at the open door for a moment, not understanding that a stranger could look at *him*, all bloody and battered, and offer their help.

His headache propelled him into action, sliding into the warm car and sighing at the respite for his aching legs. Will leaned his head back against the soft fabric of the passenger seat.

"Where are we?" he murmured.

The man put the car back into motion and glanced at him. "Řepov. 45 minutes outside Prague."

"The Czech Republic," Will chuckled lightly, until he coughed. "How far is that from Florence?"

The man shrugged. "Few hours by plane, but whole day by car."

Will hummed and closed his eyes. So far, on his first trip to Europe, he'd traveled by boat, plane, car, and train. Chioyh had been the one to suggest a train, so she could take her rifle, but Will had no such worries now. Everything he'd had remained on the train he was just so unceremoniously pushed out of. He supposed he'd take a plane now.

He'd never been more grateful for forgetting his wallet in his coat pocket in his life.

"I'll pay you," Will mumbled. "Take me to Prague."

The guy sighed and shot Will a tired look.

"I take you to Prague," he stated. "But not tonight, and not in *pyžama.* We go tomorrow, in real clothing. Okay?"

Will's lips twitched, and he looked down at himself. His coat was nice, but it was dirty and had a few bloodstains. His pajamas were low-quality, and Will absolutely did not want to see

Hannibal again while wearing them. He needed a wardrobe change.

“Okay. Tomorrow,” Will agreed, yawning. He was tired. “I’m Will.”

“Matyáš. Sleep, Will.”

Will closed his eyes, and when he reached Matyáš’s house a few minutes later he stumbled inside, collapsed onto the couch, and was sound asleep.

Matyáš was a good man. He fed Will a simple breakfast in the morning, handed him a first aid kit and spare clothes, and directed him to his tiny bathroom. Will awoke in pain but more lucid than the night before, and was grateful for the supplies and hot shower.

Will’s wounds were a lot more visible after a shower and in the soft light of morning. He wiped the steam off the mirror and studied his injuries, hissing when he pressed too hard on a particularly tender spot. It looked like his whole body was one big, yellow and purple bruise. His back, his legs, his chest… the worst to look at, however, was probably his face.

The entire left side of his face was banged up from where he landed on the train tracks; he had a couple scabs on his forehead and multiple cuts on his cheek and neck — nothing too deep, but bad enough to stay visible for days. He had a big black eye, and a bruise on his nose that made it look like he got punched.

He was annoyed at Chiyoh for injuring him this badly, but to be honest he didn’t really blame her. Perhaps he should take being thrown off a train personally, but he knew Chiyoh was just trying to protect Hannibal. It annoyed him, because he didn’t like the idea of anyone interfering with him and Hannibal, but he understood the protective instinct. A part of Will still felt that same protective instinct for Hannibal.

Will washed his wounds with antiseptic, grimacing, and carefully dabbed antibiotic cream on them afterwards. He ignored the rest of the first-aid kit, though. He wasn’t about to put

bandaids on his entire face, and it was probably better to let the wounds breathe, anyway. He wondered if Hannibal would have cleaned him up differently, if his practiced doctor's hands would be purely clinical as they patched up his injuries or if they would touch with reverence.

Will remembered how Hannibal touched him after Randall Tier, how he bandaged Will's hands with care. Will had never been touched so gently before, like he was worthy of being cherished.

He quickly shook off those dangerous thoughts and slowly maneuvered into the ratty but functional clothes Matyáš kindly provided him, wincing as his muscles ached from the movement. He took one last look at his appearance, figured it was good enough until he got to Prague, and joined Matyáš outside where he was smoking a cigarette.

The older man gave him a once-over and a quick nod of approval before he stomped out his cigarette and got into his little car. Will slid in after him, and soon enough they were flying down the highway straight towards the Czech capital. They spent the drive in silence, which was perfectly fine with Will as it gave him an opportunity to look out the window at the surrounding countryside. He had never been to the Czech Republic before.

Hannibal and I... afforded each other an experience that we may not otherwise have had.

They got to the city just under an hour later and Matyáš dropped him off near a respected tailor shop, at Will's request. He pulled out a wad of cash, all American dollars, and was about to apologize for the lack of local currency when Matyáš waved him off.

"No money. I'm happy to help." He reached out a hand, which Will shook. "Whatever in Florence…. I hope it good for you."

Will chuckled. "I hope it's good for me too. Thank you, Matyáš. You're a good man."

Matyáš smiled. "Goodbye, Will."

“Goodbye.”

He watched as his new friend’s car spluttered down the city street and waved in farewell. Will hadn’t expected to meet anyone besides Hannibal when he got to Europe, and so far he had met three – the old woman in Lithuania, Chiyoh, and Matthias.

Will turned and walked inside the tailor shop, the little bell jingling to announce his entrance. The shop was empty save for the tailor himself, a testament to how early it still was. The tailor glanced up and took in Will’s ratty clothes with a grimace, before waddling over to help.

“*Mohu vám pomoci?*” the guy asked. Will shook his head with a tired smile.

“English?”

“Ah.” The tailor nodded. “Can I help you, sir?”

“I need a suit,” Will explained. “Something nice, but not too formal. And… a blue dress shirt to go with it.”

The tailor chewed his lip. “If you want it today, you’ll have to buy it off the rack, but I have something that should work.”

Will smiled at him. “That sounds great, thank you.”

The guy immediately went to work, combing through the suits in his inventory to find one suitable. Will drifted to the display of dress shirts, and tried to decide on the right shade of blue. There were a lot of choices, ranging from light turquoise to dark navy. Will stared at the array of colorful shirts and swallowed.

Hannibal would probably prefer something that matched his eyes, which would be either ocean blue or midnight blue. However, Will's pride refused to consider those as options precisely because Hannibal would like them. Instead, Will's eyes landed on a color that he'd never worn before.

It was a mix between light blue and seafoam green, just dull enough that the color didn't burn his eyes. It wasn't a color that would strictly match Will's eyes, but it was technically still blue. He figured it was a nice compromise.

Will picked up the dress shirt and turned around to see the tailor holding up a black suit and eyeing him.

"This is probably the best one for you," he decided. "It is small and slim, but not tiny."

Will chose not to comment on that and took the suit with his free hand. "Can I wear it out?"

The guy looked Will over. "It's probably best if you do."

"Can you hear me, *Signor* Pazzi?"

Hannibal lightly slapped the man's face a few times to rouse him. He hadn't drugged him very much, just enough to strap him down to the gurney with ease. Hannibal wanted Pazzi to be awake and lucid when he killed him, but silent. Duct tape, Hannibal found from experience, was the best tool to keep mouths shut.

"Take a deep breath while you can," Hannibal instructed, watching Pazzi's eyes begin to flutter. "Clear your head."

When he was satisfied Pazzi was aware enough to follow his directions, Hannibal wheeled the officer to the top of the balcony. His ancestor Francseco had been hanged from the *Palazzo*, and it was only fitting that the man kept up the family tradition.

Hannibal opened the big windows to make room for Pazzi and breathed in the crisp night air. It was late enough that the Palazzo was deserted, and Hannibal had always liked the intimacy of being alone with his prey.... Although he wondered if he would also enjoy sharing that intimacy with another. The thought brought back the melancholy he had been trying to fight for eight months, to no avail.

As Hannibal gazed out into the darkness, he realized something and turned back to smirk at Pazzi. “I haven’t had a bite all day.”

“Actually,” Hannibal continued, “your liver and kidneys would be suitable for dinner right away. Tonight even,” he mused as he took a power cord laying around and started looping it into a noose. “But the rest of the meat should hang at least a week in the current cool conditions.”

Pazzi side-eyed him and Hannibal found his spirits lifted. “I didn’t see the forecast, did you?”

Hannibal smiled at Pazzi’s inability to respond. “I gather that means ‘no.’ If you tell me what I need to know, *Commendatore*, it would be convenient for me to leave without my meal.”

Hannibal worked on the noose some more, making sure it was sturdy enough to hold Pazzi’s weight. “I will ask you the questions, and then we’ll see.”

“You can trust me, you know,” Hannibal continued. “Though I expect you find trust difficult, knowing yourself. When the police didn’t come, it was clear you had sold me. Was it Mason Verger you sold me to?”

To Hannibal’s delight, Pazzi managed to nod.

“Thank you,” he said politely. “I called the number on his wanted site once, far from here, just for fun.” Hannibal smiled widely, remembering how enjoyable that exchange was. It would have been so easy to give Mason a false lead, although Hannibal had no real need to do so. Mason Verger was a pig, and Hannibal did not fear pigs.

He finished the noose and secured it around Pazzi’s neck. “Have you told anyone at the *Questura* about me?”

Pazzi moved his head.

“Was that a no?”

Pazzi started breathing heavily and he was saved from any further questioning when his cell phone rang.

“Excuse me,” Hannibal told him, answering the phone. “*Pronto*.”

“Inspector Pazzi. My name is Alana Bloom. You don’t know me, but I know your benefactor __ ”

“Hello Alana,” Hannibal responded lightly. He was unaware that Alana had joined forces with Mason Verger, but he was impressed. Good for her, to be so headstrong in her recovery to seek revenge. Not that she would obtain it. “I’m afraid the inspector is otherwise occupied.”

There was a shocked pause.

“Is he dead?” Alana stuttered out. Hannibal smiled.

“There is nothing I’d love more than to be able to chat with you, Alana, but you caught me at a rather awkward moment. Nice to hear your voice.”

He hung up the phone and turned his attention back to Pazzi.

"So, *Commendatore,* which do you think?" Hannibal unbuttoned the man's suit to expose his abdomen. "Bowels in, or bowels out?"

Hannibal took out his Harpy knife and snapped it open. "Out, I think."

He plunged the blade into Pazzi's soft flesh and dragged it down the entirety of his lower torso, intentionally cutting much deeper than when he had cut Will. In the next moment, Hannibal swiftly tipped Pazzi out of the window.

The inspector plummeted off the balcony and a split-second later the cable noose around his neck could extend no further and pulled taut, halting Pazzi's descent and breaking his neck with a loud *CRACK*. He swayed, dead, from the force of his violent descent as his innards splattered down upon the smooth stone below him.

Hannibal looked over the edge of the balcony to assess his work, and a figure looked up at him. He was a tad surprised to see Jack Crawford, but not altogether shocked. He must have been working with Pazzi.

Hannibal was pleased that he was not working with Will. It seemed that Will was on his own journey, and wanted Jack to have no part of it. It was about time Will distanced himself from Jack, Hannibal thought with pride.

Hannibal titled his head and waited for Jack to make the first move. He did so not a moment later, rushing into the *Palazzo* after Hannibal instead of taking the safer route and calling *la polizia*. Hannibal smirked, happy that he had another opportunity to fight Jack. The last one had gone in his favor, and he was curious to see what this rematch would entail.

Hannibal returned to his workroom with all the torture instruments at a brisk pace. His instincts sensed Jack's presence already in the room, and his nose confirmed it.

“Hello Jack,” Hannibal said, scanning the room for any glimpse of his former friend. “Did you get my note?”

He reached into his pocket and silently unfolded his knife.

“I am truly sorry about Bella,” Hannibal murmured. “For her, night and day must have been very much the same in the end.”

He was being honest in his condolences, but he was also using them to make Jack enraged and reveal himself. It was a strategy Hannibal employed frequently; using his honest feelings to manipulate people. He’d done it with Will countless times, before he realized that Will was doing the same.

Hannibal prowled into the room. “When she could no longer stir or speak, did you speak for her?” He paused to check for signs of Jack's location, then continued when he found none. “I imagine you were capable of giving any medication Bella may have needed in the night.”

No sounds at that, either.

“Did you practice injections on an orange, Jack?”

That got him a response; music started coming from his record-player behind him. Hannibal turned in its direction, eyes sharp for his prey.

“What medication did you give her in the end?” Hannibal asked. “Was it too much? Or just enough?”

From behind, Jack grabbed his shoulder and shoved him through the closest display case. Glass shattered and Hannibal landed hard, snarling slightly at Jack’s ability to sneak up on him. He had learned something after their last encounter.

Hannibal stood up, only to have Jack kick him in the chest and propel him through the back of the glass case. Pain enveloped Hannibal's back as he broke the glass and hit the floor with a smack. He lay there, winded, and received a hard punch once he tried to get up.

Blood dripped out of Hannibal's mouth and he crawled towards his knife, which had flown out of his hand on his second trip through glass. Before he could reach his blade, however, Jack slammed down an antique torture hook in his leg.

Hannibal cried out in pain and kicked with his uninjured leg as Jack dragged him backwards, away from the knife, but Jack dodged his kick and punched him a few more times. After a particularly brutal blow, Hannibal landed on his back again. He smiled through the pain and the blood in his mouth, grabbing onto Jack when the man hauled him up.

His efforts did not pay off, however, and Jack threw him a few yards away near the breaking wheel. Hannibal's head was spinning at this point from all the blows, but he made sure to yank the hook out of his leg. More pain raced up his leg, and before he could pull himself together Jack punched him again, this time Hannibal falling backwards and half-landing into the breaking wheel with its force. Jack took advantage of his position and pushed on the wheel, straining Hannibal's arm but not quite breaking it. Hannibal panted loudly but did not scream.

"I brought Bella back from death, and you returned her to it," Hannibal laughed, not the least bit concerned with the pain. "Is that where you're taking me, Jack?"

Jack punched him again, and Hannibal knew the answer was yes.

He collapsed onto the floor, his arm now released from the breaking wheel. Jack hauled him up again, hit him a few more times, and Hannibal was able to crawl to the balcony ledge where he had just said goodbye to Inspector Pazzi. Jack let him go, taking his time to retrieve the meat hook he previously stuck in Hannibal's leg. Hannibal wondered where he planned to stick it this time.

Hannibal panted hard, each breath causing him pain. His entire body burned, but he was not afraid to die. If Jack killed him, Hannibal would be proud of him. He only wished it was Will

who managed to kill him, instead.

“How will you feel when I’m gone?” Hannibal wondered.

Through his swollen eye, he could make out Jack’s smile.

“Alive,” he relished, and smacked Hannibal’s face with the meat hook.

Hannibal tumbled backwards out of the window, grabbing onto the first thing he touched. Pazzi’s shirt was wet with blood, but Hannibal made his way down the man’s dead body until he could hold on no longer and let go, dropping the last eight feet to the ground.

The landing left him winded, but Hannibal got to his feet, gave Jack one last look, and staggered away into the dawn very much alive.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be Dolce, which is so emotional so it'll probably take me about two weeks. I really appreciate everyone's comments and support, they keep me going <3

Dolce Part 1

Chapter Summary

> “If I saw you everyday, forever, Will, I would remember this time,” Hannibal murmured, eyes soft.

Chapter Notes

> Hi! I decided to split this episode in half because, as I was getting close to the end, I realized the chapter was getting to be like 10k hahaha so I figured I'd split it in half to make it easier to digest and also, I'm not completely done with it yet and I wanted y'all to have something today :)
>
> Enjoy the first part of Dolce ~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will left the Florence airport in his new suit and suddenly realized he didn’t know where to go.

Hannibal was in this city somewhere, he was sure, but Will didn’t know exactly where he was. He would probably be living in an affluent, old part of the city, but canvassing an entire section of Florence like that would take too long. Hannibal wouldn’t need to have a job, he had enough money, but Will knew he would be unable to resist visiting the fine art or history museums, in a professional or personal capacity. After all, it was the art that made Hannibal fall in love with this city in the first place.

Will took a cab to the museum district, determined to visit every building with his eyes peeled, and somehow wasn’t surprised to see police lights and sirens centered around one of the museums.

“Stop here,” Will commanded the cab driver, almost throwing money at him in his haste to get out of the car.

Will approached the crowd behind the police line, craning his neck to catch a glimpse of what was happening. There were officers everywhere, many more than what Will would expect for the average tourist dropping dead from a heart attack, and his heart thudded at the promise of Hannibal.

He could vaguely make out something hanging in the stone courtyard of a few buildings from his place on the street, and prowled around for a closer look. To his luck, there was a slim opening between two columns that the police hadn't blocked off, and Will slipped through and walked leisurely towards the crime scene in his suit, trying to look like he belonged there.

He lingered in the shadows, not wanting to be seen by the police just yet, and simply observed the scene in front of him. There was a man hanging from a balcony, a bright orange power cord wrapped around his neck. That in itself was too shocking and could have easily been a suicide or some random murder, except that the man's guts had been sliced from his flesh and violently splattered onto the smooth stones of the courtyard.

Will's eyes widened at the bloody scene in the morning light, and he knew this couldn't be a coincidence. Police were swarming the place like ants hungry for a cookie crumble and there was a body, bowels out, right where Will expected to find Hannibal. He closed his eyes, and clearly imagined Hannibal putting the noose around the man's neck, cutting him open, and shoving him off the balcony. This was judgement, and punishment. This was Hannibal's design.

"Cut him down already," a familiar voice growled. "You've taken enough pictures!"

Will opened his eyes and couldn't help the smile twitching at his lips. If Jack Crawford was here, then this was certainly Hannibal's work. He probably picked up the trail in Palermo, and somehow followed Hannibal here. Somehow...

Will narrowed his eyes at the body as they cut it down, finally making out the man's face, and understood. It was Pazzi, and he had apparently enlisted Jack's help to catch Hannibal when he couldn't get Will's.

It looked as if Will was right, and Hannibal had killed Pazzi after all.

"Jack," Will called, stepping out of the shadows. Jack turned, looking older than Will remembered and perhaps a bit more ruffled. He wasn't wearing a tie, and his shirt was untucked. Will was one to talk, since half his face was an open wound. He had an excuse though, he got pushed off a train — he wondered what Jack's excuse was.

They shook hands like old friends, although Will wasn't sure that's what they were anymore.

"I'm not surprised to see you here," Jack sighed. "I'm just surprised I found him before you."

Will bit back the dark chuckle that threatened to spill out of him, remembering how it felt to be inches away from Hannibal in the catacombs below the Norman Chapel. *You didn't.*

"What happened?" Will asked, trying to focus on the Hannibal of a few hours ago instead of the Hannibal of a few days ago.

"I think that's fairly obvious, Will. What isn't obvious is where you've been all this time," Jack said, studying his face. "Pazzi told me you were in Palermo, before I got there. He said you left."

"I did leave," Will replied coolly, avoiding the question. "Hannibal wasn't there."

"No," Jack exhaled. "He was here. Pazzi ran into him accidentally, almost as if it was fate. He was working as a museum curator at the Palazzo here, assuming the identity of British professor Roman Fell."

Will hummed, not surprised. "Hannibal recognized Pazzi from 20 years ago, and killed him."

"Yes," Jack confirmed.

Will's gaze drifted back to the pile of intestines and inner organs, deflated and stinking, on the ground a few yards away. "You said you saw him?"

"I fought him," Jack corrected. Will's gaze snapped back to Jack and the older man started walking towards the nearest building. "Let me show you."

Will followed him into the museum where Hannibal worked, up the stairs and into an exhibit room full of medieval torture equipment. He didn't need to ask to know that the entire collection was Hannibal's pet project.

Before WIll could fully take in his surroundings, Jack handed him an old wooden carving. Will examined it, taking in the visage of a hanged man with his guts spilling out and the word Pazzi engraved below him. Will traced the lines of the wooden man's arms with his fingers and remained silent. This was Hannibal's inspiration for Pazzi's death, a family tradition of judgement and punishment. Hannibal must have been so pleased to be able to finally recreate the image, Will could almost *see* his fucking smirk.

Will looked up from the carving with an undefined ache and scanned the room where Hannibal worked.

Various torture instruments lay scattered or exposed, obviously out of their intended places. There was shattered glass on the floor, and smears of blood everywhere. It was evident that there had been a fight, but Jack didn't look beat up. Will turned to look at him with a raised eyebrow, and Jack nodded.

"He's wounded… and he's worried."

Will sighed and reached out to touch one of the torture devices that had come loose in the fight, a sort of hook that really wasn't Hannibal's style. Will set it back in its place anyway. "Hannibal doesn't worry. Knowing he's in danger won't rattle him any more than killing does."

Jack was silent for a moment. “If Rinaldo Pazzi had decided to do his duty as an officer of the law, he would have determined very quickly that he was Hannibal Lecter. Would have taken less than 30 minutes to get a warrant.”

“All those resources were denied to Pazzi,” Will pointed out, walking to the other side of the room towards the larger torture instruments. “As soon as he decided to sell Hannibal, he became a bounty hunter.”

“Outside the law and alone,” Jack murmured.

Will hummed, slowly prowling behind Jack.

“Well, here we are. Outside the law and alone,” Jack stated.

Will wanted to smile. *Again.*

“Have you told *la polizia* they’re looking for Hannibal Lecter?” Will said instead.

Jack hesitated. “They’re motivated to find Dr. Fell inside the law. Knowing who he is, what he’s worth, it’ll just coax them out of bounds.” Just like Pazzi.

“That’d be a free for all,” Will agreed.

“And Hannibal will slip away,” Jack grumbled.

There was loaded silence as Jack glanced at the ground, then looked back up at Will.

“Will you slip away with him?”

Will met his gaze directly. The man looked disapproving, but under that Will could detect a layer of concern. Whether it was concern for Will's well-being or concern that he would help Hannibal escape, Will couldn't be sure. He thought back to a few months ago, when Jack visited him in Wolf Trap and Will was still broken enough to reveal more than he intended about what happened that night in Hannibal's kitchen.

Will was more confident as he asserted his feelings this time. "Part of me will always want to."

It was something he'd come to accept, that part of him that rejoiced in the darkness and was hopelessly drawn to Hannibal. It wasn't something Hannibal created, it was something already living inside Will that Hannibal spoke to, pushed, and cultivated. Will cultivated it too, with every life he took and every fantasy of Hannibal.

"You have to cut that part out," Jack warned.

This time, Will couldn't contain the chuckle that fell from his lips. Will didn't think it was possible to cut that part of himself out. It was ingrained into who he was, it always had been, and although he tried to resist listening to it, on occasion he found himself giving into the dark impulses more frequently. He was holding onto the various social constructions of morality by a thread, at this point.

Will did want to tear that part out, sometimes. Hannibal was buried so deeply inside that violent space that Will couldn't help but want to tear it open and burn the entire thing, just to cleanse himself of Hannibal's influence. Anything to be free of Hannibal's tight grip on his mind, and on his heart. He hated Hannibal for everything he put Will through, for how much he lied and hurt him, but…

Will forgave him. It wasn't something he could control, it was just something that happened. He didn't know if it was the growing darkness inside him, or the light, or the countless shades of gray, but Will had forgiven Hannibal for his transgressions. He couldn't control his feelings, and he knew that nothing he did would work in severing his connection from Hannibal. Even if he ignored it, it would always be there, lingering in the back of his mind and behind his teeth.

He had wanted to run away with Hannibal then, he wanted to run away with Hannibal now, and Will knew he would still want to run away with Hannibal far into the future. He couldn't control the wanting, but Will could control what he did about it.

The thing was, he was still unsure of what *to do* about it.

Will turned away from Jack and changed the subject. "No, of course you found him here. Not because of the exhibit, but because of the crowd it attracts."

He walked in front of one of the only intact display cases, admiring the starvation cage within. It was in the shape of a man, and as Will stared at it he could imagine himself trapped inside.

"You had him Jack. He was beaten. Why didn't you kill him?" Will asked, curious.

Jack sighed. "Maybe I need you to."

Will wanted to laugh again. "Did you not talk to Pazzi at all? I thought I made it very clear that I am undecided on that matter."

"I know you're undecided," Jack dismissed. "That's exactly why you need to be the one to do it."

Will closed his eyes. "Cut off the head of the snake…"

"And the body follows," Jack finished. "Cut him *out*, Will."

Will took a shuddering breath. "I can't promise anything, Jack, but...I'll try."

And he will try. God, Will's been trying to fight back against Hannibal for so long now that he doesn't know how to interact with the man without wanting to hurt him. Will knew he'd try to hurt Hannibal when he saw him again, but he also knew… his mind would be screaming at him the entire time, begging him not to do it. Will was unsure which voice in his conflicted heart would win and that uncertainty made him worry, but it was also starting to wear him down. He was getting tired of constantly analyzing himself and trying to predict his behavior when the uncertainties were growing and making it harder and harder to do.

"We have his cover name," Jack said, mercifully dropping the subject for now. "Pazzi left me his notes on him. If we hurry, we can get to his apartment before *la polizia* bust in."

"Bedelia is with him." It wasn't a question.

Jack nods anyway. "They're posing as a married couple."

Will takes a deep breath to calm an unexpected spike of rage and opens his eyes.

"Let's go pay the happy couple a visit."

Hannibal slouched on the balcony with his sketchbook, enjoying the view of old-town Florence. He didn't move a lot, since his wounds were very fresh and still healing, but that did not impact the quality of his drawing. He was satisfied with his recreation of the Florence landscape, aware that this would likely be the last time he had the chance to do so with the model in front of him.

"I want to be able to draw these streets from memory," he told Bedelia as she approached and glanced at his sketchbook. "I want to be able to draw the *Palazzo Vecchio,* and the Duomo."

He looked out at the city of his youth and mentally categorized every building, every roof he could see into his mind palace.

“You won’t be coming back here for a very long time,” Bedelia sighed, gently taking the sketchbook out of Hannibal’s hands.

“Memories of Florence will be all I have,” Hannibal agreed. He glanced at Bedelia before looking back at the skyline. “Florence is where I became a man.” Hannibal smiled, it was quite poetic when he thought about it. “I see my end in my beginning.”

“All of our endings can be found in our beginnings,” Bedelia mused, walking away from the balcony and back into the apartment. “History repeats itself, and there is no escape.”

Hannibal followed her, limping lightly and ignoring the pain that surfaced with every step. There were some bags laid out on the dining table, two small duffels to be exact.

“You’ve packed lightly,” he observed.

“I’ve packed for you,” Bedelia replied airily. Hannibal raised his eyebrows, and Bedelia turned to face him. “This is where I leave you. Or, more accurately, where you leave me.”

Bedelia had once again managed to impress him. She was making a valiant effort to seem like she did not fear him, and if her voice did not shake when she was speaking Hannibal might’ve even been tempted to believe her.

“This isn’t how I intended to say goodbye,” Hannibal noted. “I imagined it differently.”

He watched in delight as Bedelia gulped.

“I didn’t,” she responded, stepping towards him on shaky legs, using the dining chairs as support. “I knew that you intended to eat me, and I knew that you had no intention of eating me hastily.”

Hannibal smiled slightly. “Would be a shame not to savor you.”

Bedelia stopped inches away and craned her neck up to look at him. “I have not marinated long enough for your tastes. When they come for you…”

“And they will come,” Hannibal reflected.

“What will you say of me?” Bedelia inquired softly.

Hannibal tilted his head. “I will help you tell the version of events you want to be told. I will help you because you asked me to.”

Bedelia leaned up closer and her eyes sparkled. “You may make a meal of me yet, Hannibal...”

She gently closed the distance between their lips, and Hannibal’s eyes fell shut to enjoy what he imagined would be the last time he felt her touch. She pulled back a moment later, although Hannibal noticed with his nose, smirking, that it wasn’t from lack of arousal.

“... but not today,” she whispered.

Hannibal watched with amusement as Bedelia retreated to the bathroom, leaving him alone to make a graceful exit. The apartment was never home, Hannibal mused as he glanced at the master bedroom. It functioned more like purgatory, an in between place where he resided, waiting, until Will found him again.

It wouldn’t be long now. Hannibal was exposed, quite by design, and it was only a matter of time until Will appeared and dragged him out of purgatory and into either heaven or hell. He was excited to find out which it would be, which plan he would enact as a response to Will’s actions. But more than anything, Hannibal realized, more than what they might do to each other…

He was excited to simply see Will again.

Hannibal's hands reached for the bags, unzipping to reveal a few changes of clothes and toiletries. Predictably, the clothes were only his, and Hannibal nodded to himself before grabbing hold of the bag and gingerly making his way towards the master bedroom.

He had been avoiding this room ever since he arrived in Florence, with the exception of a few occasions in which he had needed space to regulate his emotions or feel closer to Will. Presently, Hannibal did not linger in his melancholy and instead made his way directly to the large wardrobe situated on the wall opposite to the equally large bed. He moved slowly to open the heavy doors of the wardrobe, mindful of his injuries, and pushed back the hangers on the right side of the wardrobe to better examine the clothes on the left side.

Will's clothes were in pristine condition, which was expected because they had never been worn. Hannibal reached out and touched the soft fabric of the first shirt, a white button-down. He never got the chance to see Will in white, but Hannibal imagined he'd look beautiful.

Hannibal sighed, then took the white shirt, along with some pants and undergarments, and added them to his bag of clothes. It never hurt to be prepared, after all.

He turned away from the wardrobe, scanned the master bedroom one last time, and nodded. There was nothing left for him here except the ghosts of the past. He had places to be, and people to see.

Hannibal walked out of his Florence apartment for the last time with his head held high, closing the door behind him with a soft *click*.

Jack knocked hard on the Fell's apartment door, and Will was surprised he didn't just bust in unannounced. They had hurried to Hannibal's hideout together, making a slight detour on the way. Will spied a knife shop at the edge of the museum district and stopped in the middle of

the street, realizing with a laugh that he was going to meet Hannibal and didn't have a weapon.

Jack understood his hesitation immediately and said nothing as they walked into the store together, bought what they needed, and were quickly on their way again. The knife was a reassuring weight in Will's pocket, giving him a sense of security that may have been misplaced.

Will still wasn't sure what was going to happen, but the knife was a nice option to have. He knew he wouldn't use it to kill Hannibal, but he might use it to hurt him. Hannibal had left Will with a scar, and Will wanted to return the favor.

You fantasize about killing me.

Yes.

Tell me, how would you do it?

With my hands.

Will had not changed his mind since that conversation. He wanted to wring Hannibal's neck, to straddle him while he squeezed his throat and watched his face turn purple. A gun, a knife, any other method was too impersonal and wouldn't be a just punishment. If Will was going to kill Hannibal, it would be with his own hands.

Jack banged on the door again, and Will heard soft shuffling sounds from inside the apartment. The two men exchanged a look, and Will was ready. He was ready to see Hannibal again.

He was not ready for the door to open and to feel a rush of rage at the sight of Bedelia du Maurier peering up at him.

“Mrs. Fell, I presume?” Will spat out.

Hannibal was not here. If he were, he would have answered the door himself, proud to face whatever Will had to throw at him. But Bedelia was here instead, Hannibal was gone again, and Will was pissed.

Bedelia opened the door wide, a silent invitation to enter, and turned away to wander back into the apartment. Will and Jack stepped across the threshold and Will’s brow furrowed as he watched Bedelia walk on unsteady legs to the living area and plop down on a lounge chair.

“She’s high,” he muttered to Jack. Jack nodded to Will and pointed to a few vials on the table that had escaped Will’s attention. They both followed Bedelia into the living room, and Jack picked up one of the vials to study it further.

“My husband is a doctor,” Bedelia explained, splayed loosely onto the chair. “He’s been treating my condition.”

“And what condition is that… *Mrs. Fell?*” Jack asked sarcastically.

“I get confused,” Bedelia replied lightly. Will felt another surge of anger rush through him.

“Oh, please,” Will sassed. “You need to get over yourself. Whatever *self* that is, Bedelia.”

Bedelia narrowed her eyes at him. “My name is Lydia Fell.”

Will chuckled darkly, a little unsure where his anger was coming from but very aware of it thrumming through his body. “You expect us to believe that you somehow lost yourself in the *hot darkness* of Hannibal Lecter’s mind? That Lydia Fell is some construct?”

Jack, also obviously annoyed at Bedelia's performance, got out his phone and brought up a picture of Bedelia's missing person report. "It's you, isn't it?"

Bedelia visibly struggled to focus on the picture through her drug-induced fog and frowned. "Well, now I'm really confused."

Will huffed another angry laugh and leaned on the arm of Bedelia's chair, hovering over her with a sharp smile. He spoke slowly, making sure Bedelia understood the meaning of his words. "I….don't...believe you."

It's a mockery of the words she said to him in the BSHCI, and Will could tell she understood as she lolled her head to the side to look at him. Bedelia had rightfully believed him then, and Will was rightfully seeing through her lies now.

"You are not confused, *Bedelia*," Jack stressed.

"That is not my name," Bedelia replied with a lazy smile.

"Oh, you know who you are and what you've done," Will jeered. "And you know exactly how you're going to wiggle out of it." He walked over to the vials of drugs and picked one up. "What is this? Sedatives? Hypnotics? Ethanol? Scopolamine? Midazolam?"

"Same cocktail Dr. Lecter served Miriam Lass," Jack guessed. "You've been freebasing your alibi." Jack sighed. "And I'm not even mad at you. To tell the truth, I'm fairly impressed."

Will snorted. He was not impressed at all, and he was plenty mad.

"Mostly because you're still alive," Will cut in, still speaking in that mocking tone. "When this fog of yours clears, I'd love to hear how you managed that."

What was so special about Bedelia? What did Hannibal see in her that he didn't see in Will? Will hated that she could get so close to Hannibal and come out unscathed. He was beyond pissed that she was given that opportunity and simply *chose* to step away from it — like it was some common gift and not something sacred, something rare, something that Will had *bled* for.

"You say my husband--"

Will bared his teeth at the word.

"--murdered a chief investigator. Where is the *polizia*? Shouldn't they be questioning me?"

"Don't worry," Jack said, sitting in a chair across from Bedelia and cutting off his line of sight to Will and the front door. "They will."

"They sure are taking their time," Bedelia noted. "What could possibly be the delay?"

Will locked eyes with her and realized with annoyance that she wasn't going to give him any real answers, not now. If Will wanted to find Hannibal, he'd have to do so himself. On his own, like he planned in the first place.

Will silently turned away from Bedelia, walking out of the apartment and back into the Florence afternoon sunlight. He left Jack behind as well, not wanting any more extra people involved in what was supposed to be an intimate affair between Will and Hannibal. He was sick of Bedelia taunting him, he was sick of Jack pushing him, he was sick of all the obstacles he had to overcome to find Hannibal again.

He took a deep breath and started walking back towards the museum district. Will knew Hannibal like he knew himself, and he knew without a doubt where Hannibal would go after leaving the shattered sanctuary of his luxury apartment. He would go to the place that had entranced him all those years ago, as a young man becoming.

The Uffizi Gallery was a beautiful building in the center of the museum district, but Will barely admired the outside of it as he hurried inside, fighting his way through the mass exodus of tourists. He slapped some money on the ticket counter and the teenage clerk regarded him wearily.

"We're about to close," the kid said in heavily accented English.

"But you're not closed yet," Will pointed out.

The teen rolled his eyes but collected Will's money and shoved a ticket at him. Will exhaled in relief.

"*La Primavera?*" he inquired.

The kid sighed, not caring anymore about the bruised American eager to enter the gallery. "Second hallway to the right."

Will nodded at him, composed himself, and strolled into the exhibit hall, following the strong pull to Hannibal. His body itched to simultaneously race towards Hannibal and bolt as far away as possible, but Will consciously made the decision to walk forward at a normal pace.

He turned the corner and was struck by the vivid colors of the *Primavera*, a much larger painting than he expected, on the far wall. He took a deep breath and walked closer, eyes falling to the lone man sitting on the bench in front of the Botticelli.

Hannibal was sketching, just like Will imagined he would be. As Will approached slowly, he could make out fresh wounds on one side of Hannibal's face, not unlike the ones on Will's own face.

Sitting down on the bench next to him was the easiest choice Will ever made, even if he groaned from the creaking of his bruised limbs. He turned, and met Hannibal's eyes for the

first time in over eight months. Hannibal was smiling at him, and Will's lips quirked, and it felt like home.

Will sighed, soaking in the moment, and then Hannibal said something that Will would remember to his dying day.

"If I saw you everyday, forever, Will, I would remember this time," Hannibal murmured, eyes soft.

Will let out a genuinely happy laugh and smiled wider than he had in years. He couldn't begin to articulate an adequate response to that through how warm he suddenly felt inside. He could practically feel the bond connecting them, as if it was a physical thing linking their insides together. Will sighed again, feeling all the tension built up from the past year and all the anger from today he had at Bedelia drain out of his body in one moment.

"Strange, seeing you here in front of me," Will confessed. "Been staring at afterimages of you in places you haven't been in years."

Hannibal hummed, and they both glanced at the painting before them. Will thought it was beautiful, and he wished he could've seen Hannibal's recreation of it all those years ago. It was probably Hannibal's first real work of art, and Will hated that he hadn't been able to see it in person.

"To market, to market, to buy a fat pig. Home again, home again, jiggity jig."

Will laughed again. Hannibal had never made jokes before, when he wore his person suit in Baltimore. He felt incredibly blessed that even after all they'd been through, Hannibal was joking with him now. He was comfortable enough to let Will see this side of him, after all this time spent apart. Will could understand, because in that moment he felt flayed open and raw, like he couldn't hide anything even if he tried to.

"I wanted to understand you, before I laid eyes on you again," Will murmured. "I needed it to be clear... what I was seeing."

He looked at Hannibal's face again, looked in his sparkling dark eyes and found the clarity that he had worked so hard to find. Hannibal was bare to him, and Will understood him more than he even understood himself.

Hannibal stared back at him and smiled softly. "Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?"

"Mine?" Will asked, brow furrowing. "Before you, and after you. Yours? It's all starting to bur."

Time was relative to each person, and they were no exception. Hannibal was a force of nature in Will's life, and his sense of time revolved around Hannibal's presence. Since Will knew all of Hannibal now, he knew that Hannibal didn't differentiate events according to when they occurred. For Hannibal, events in his childhood were just as fresh as if they had happened yesterday.

"Mischa. Abigail. Chiyoh," Will whispered. They were all parts of Hannibal, blended together to make him into what he was today. What he had always been.

"How is Chiyoh?" Hannibal inquired.

"She pushed me off a train," Will offered.

He could feel Hannibal's smile without having to turn his head. "Atta girl."

Will closed his eyes briefly, knowing that he had to breach the mess between them, the mess that Will still didn't know what he was going to do about.

"You and I… have begun to blur," Will exhaled.

Hannibal was silent for a beat. “Isn’t that how you found me?”

Will knew it would be like this. He knew that Hannibal would see beauty where he saw horror. Codependency did help Will find him, but the price was high.

“Every crime of yours feels like one I am guilty of,” Will whispered. “Not just Abigail’s murder, every murder… stretching backward and forward in time.”

Will glanced at Hannibal out of the corner of his eye and caught his gaze.

“Freeing yourself from me, and me freeing myself from you,” Hannibal assessed. “They’re the same.”

Will nodded, tilting his head closer to Hannibal. “We’re conjoined. I’m curious whether either of us can… survive separation.”

Hannibal digested his words and held his gaze. In the back of his mind, Will wondered if this was the longest time he’d ever locked eyes with someone else. It sure felt like it.

They had been physically separated for almost a year, but that had done nothing to change their level of codependency since they had been focused on each other the entire time. Will was curious if they could truly live apart — not live for each other — and survive it.

“Now is the hardest test,” Hannibal speculated. “Not letting rage and frustration, nor forgiveness, keep you from thinking.”

Will studied him, wondering what Hannibal hoped he would think, and decide, and do. He’d probably thought out every possibility just to be prepared, but Will could waste no energy wondering about Hannibal’s actions when he was so preoccupied with determining his own.

After a charged moment, Hannibal broke their gaze, closed his sketchbook, and stood.

“Shall we?” he proposed.

Will stood as well, groaning again with the strain on his muscles. If Hannibal wanted Will to decide on a course of action, he would. He knew Hannibal was curious what he would do, if he would be able to predict it. Will was curious as well. Like Hannibal, he couldn’t predict his own behavior. Not when it came to the man standing next to him.

“After you,” Will granted.

Chapter End Notes

What did y'all think?? I was so soft when writing the gallery scene, that's literally one of my favorite scenes in the whole show...

Part 2 will be up in a few days probably, and it will have a lot of missing scenes to better explain what happened after...the gallery scene... hehehehe Y'all will love it <3

Dolce Part 2

Chapter Summary

> “Don’t worry,” Hannibal murmured. “I’m cleaning the blood off you.”
>
> Will’s eyes opened halfway and he lolled his head down to look at himself in the tub, the most movement he was allowed by the drugs coursing through his system.
>
> “Issa bad ‘scuse,” Will slurred. “You jus’ want me naked.”

Chapter Notes

> Time for the last half of Dolce!! This chapter includes A TON of missing scenes (Hannibal giving drugged up Will a bath, among others hehehe). I hope you like it! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They walked out of the Uffizi together slowly, still at the mercy of their respective wounds. Will refrained from looking at Hannibal, the simple feeling of his presence beside him enough to energize Will and inspire him to action. He felt so alive with Hannibal next to him, making the looming decision of what to do much easier. He fingered the knife in his pocket and thought about the last time a blade was involved between them, the last time they were together.

Hannibal had *gutted* him and left him bleeding out on the floor without a second glance. Will was scarred deeply by Hannibal, in more ways than one, and he realized he wanted to scar Hannibal back. He was always so untouchable, and Will resented the fact that he didn’t have a physical scar on him that marked his betrayal, like Will did.

If Hannibal wanted to push Will into action, then so be it.

In that moment, he knew he couldn’t kill Hannibal. Killing him would be like killing himself, and in spite of Jack’s goading to do just that, Will didn’t want to. He did, however, want to

stab Hannibal in the shoulder so deeply that he gets branded with the scar forever. Just like Will.

They barely saw anyone as they limped out of the gallery and into the fading light of the beautiful *Piazzale degli Uffizi*, and Will felt secure enough to grab hold of the knife. He felt every one of his heavy steps on the pavement in his chest like a heartbeat, and after a deep breath withdrew the sharp blade from his pocket, turning slightly towards Hannibal with the intent to stab him quickly but forcefully.

Suddenly, before Will could move another muscle, a piercing pain shot through his right shoulder. The entire right side of his upper body erupted in fire and Will fell backwards, choking on his cry of pain. He felt a firm arm catch him before he could completely collapse, eliciting another sound of agony from Will as the fire in his shoulder burned hotter.

Will breathed heavily as he realized he'd been shot, and clenched his teeth when Hannibal threw his uninjured arm over his shoulder and forced Will to move forward. He could barely think with his head swimming in pain and automatically followed Hannibal, leaning on him heavily for support.

Will's feet were almost dragging on the pavement but somehow, after an indeterminable amount of time of Hannibal supporting him, they crossed the threshold of a building and stumbled into the elevator.

Once stationary inside the elevator, the adrenaline that had been fueling Will's body rushed out all at once and he slumped against Hannibal completely. The pain was so blinding he felt like he was going to pass out. The only thing registering in Will's mind other than the pain was the physical sensation of Hannibal breathing hard on his neck from the strain of carrying him.

"Almost there," Hannibal panted. "Stay with me, Will."

Will wanted to smile, but he was rapidly losing control over his muscles.

"Where else would I go?"

Hannibal's arm tightened around his waist before the elevator dinged, and Will grunted in pain once more as he was dragged out of the small space and into a lavish hallway. It seemed as if their momentary rest in the elevator energized Hannibal, and he did not hesitate for a second in opening a door at the end of the long hallway and helping Will inside.

By this point Will was very dizzy, both from the agony of his wound and, he suspected, the blood loss. It was only when Hannibal deposited him on the couch that Will became aware of blood soaking his shoulder and arm, making his new suit stick uncomfortably to his skin. He felt minimally better reclining on the couch, but Will was still panting and groaning in pain. It had been over a year since he last got shot, but the pain surpassed his worst memories

He supposed that was the difference between a pistol at close range and a sniper rifle.

Suddenly Hannibal was in front of him again, holding a glass of water to his lips. Will drank as best he could through his heavy breathing, grateful for the hand on the back of his neck helping him move. All strength had left him with the blood he was steadily losing, and Will was vaguely aware that if his gunshot wound wasn't stitched up soon then he would need a blood transfusion.

"This is gonna hurt," Hannibal warned as he removed the glass of water. "The bullet is still inside you."

There was no time to protest before Hannibal reached for Will and tugged his suit jacket halfway down his back with one smooth motion. The movement jostled Will's shoulder and he cried out, shaking and unbalanced. Hannibal quickly pulled Will into his chest to steady him, tucking his head onto his shoulder and pressing his hand against the back of his neck to keep him still. Will huffed onto Hannibal's throat and in his daze remembered that the last time Hannibal held him close like this was also the last time when Will suffered incredible agony.

Hannibal held Will like that for a long moment, almost tenderly, and Will clenched his eyes shut at the rush of emotional pain that momentarily outweighed the physical pain. The physical pain spiked again, however, as Hannibal broke their embrace to lean Will back down onto the couch. Will panted and watched with heavy-lidded eyes as Hannibal started cutting his new shirt open.

“Chiyoh has always been very protective of me,” Hannibal offered.

Will laughed but it came out sounding like a wheeze. Chiyoh was overprotective and it resulted in Will getting pushed off a train and shot. It was hardly fair as Will knew, deep down, that he wasn’t going to kill Hannibal. He wanted to hurt Hannibal as much as he was hurt, but it only resulted in Will getting more injured. He huffed out another broken laugh at the irony.

Hannibal kept cutting away at the soaked fabric of Will’s shirt, revealing the oozing bullet wound in his shoulder. Will stared at Hannibal’s fingers wiping away the excess blood, and endured the pain of his soft touch. He was suddenly struck by the incredible intimacy of the moment, of Hannibal cleaning his wounds and touching him gently. It was a painful juxtaposition; each one of Hannibal’s tender touches inevitably resulted in physical and emotional agony.

It hurt that the only times Hannibal only touched Will like that when he was hurting him.

“Did she kill her tenant, or did you?” Hannibal asked, his voice calling to Will through his muddled thoughts. What were they talking about again?

Oh right. Chiyoh.

“She did,” Will choked out.

Hannibal smiled as he pulled more of Will’s shirt off. “Excellent.”

Will closed his eyes and let Hannibal’s approval wash over him as he continued to breathe heavily. Hannibal was glad that Chiyoh killed the man who supposedly killed Mischa, just as Will predicted he would be. He wondered if Hannibal would be just as proud of Will if he knew that he had manipulated her into committing the act.

As desperate as Will was to find out, he refused to ask.

Something cold was pressed into Will's open, blood-soaked hand, and his fingers twitched at the sensation. He frowned and opened his eyes, but before he could shift his head to look, Hannibal spoke.

"You dropped your forgiveness, Will."

Will curled his fingers around the knife, hating that it was in his hand but he lacked the strength to use it.

"You forgive how God forgives," Hannibal continued. "Would you have done it quickly? Or would you have stopped to gloat?"

In that moment, Will wanted to stab Hannibal with the knife more than anything. He hadn't wanted to kill him at all, let alone slowly or quickly. Anger rushed hot through Will's body, making him feel overheated when combined with the burning pain. He opened his mouth to tell Hannibal he wanted to cut him like he'd cut Will — *deeply* — but instead he asked:

"Does God gloat?" he mocked.

"Often," Hannibal murmured.

He stared at Will before reaching for something on the table next to the couch. When Will's eyes focused again, he realized it was a needle, and started to hyperventilate.

"No no no no no no," Will pleaded, shaking his head with all the strength he had left. He didn't want Hannibal to drug him again — it reminded him of his encephalitis days. He didn't want to wake up not knowing what he had experienced at Hannibal's mercy.

Hannibal ignored his begging and pierced Will's shoulder with the needle, inserting the drug into his system easily. Will felt its effects almost instantaneously; his breathing slowed, his eyes got heavier, and his muscles numbed.

"Give that a moment," he heard Hannibal say before Will's eyes closed completely.

"Not - God," Will slurred with the last of his strength. "I forgive - like you."

As the last word passed from his numbing lips, Will's mind went completely fuzzy and he slipped away into the dark sea of unconsciousness.

Hannibal caught the knife when Will's hand went limp, and watched as Will's breathing evened out. He liked observing Will when he suffered, it was fascinating how he would grow more beautiful as he felt more pain. Kneeling over Will right now, however, Hannibal appreciated how beautiful Will was when he was at peace.

His brows were smoothed out, his mouth was lax, and his chest was rising and falling in an entrancing rhythm. It was a rare sight, one Hannibal wanted to see more often.

He set the knife down on the gaudy table next to the empty syringe and stood up. Will needed to have his wound cleaned and stitched up sooner rather than later, and for that Hannibal needed his surgical bag.

He was quick about retrieving it, not wanting to leave Will alone for more than a few seconds. He had injected Will with about 3 cc's of Midazolam, enough to make him unconscious, but Will could wake up at any time. If he did, he would be very disoriented, and Hannibal would need to be there to help him through the fog.

There was a nagging thought in the back of Hannibal's mind that insisted he didn't need to take care of Will like this anymore if he planned on killing him soon, but Hannibal

steadfastly ignored it. He would patch up Will to the best of his ability and only then, when he was clean and whole, would Hannibal kill and eat him.

The prospect was not as appealing as it had once been, but Hannibal didn't see any other option. Will didn't want anything to do with Hannibal, so the only way he could continue to have Will in his life was to eat him. That way, Will would always be with him.

Hannibal pulled himself out of his thoughts, unexpectedly saddened, and knelt back at Will's side with the newly acquired surgical kit. He quickly used an alcohol wipe to clean the area, then reached for the forceps and expertly dug the bullet out of Will's shoulder. Hannibal was glad that he drugged Will for this procedure, because if he had been awake he probably would have been screaming at the pain of how deep Hannibal had to dig to reach the bullet. As it was, Will was pleasantly unconscious, and a slight sheen of sweat on his face was the only indicator that his body was suffering.

Hannibal dropped the forceps and the large bullet onto the side table and picked up the needle and surgical thread. He briefly glanced at Will's smooth face before wiping his wound clean again and getting to work stitching up the hole. It was hardly the most difficult bullet wound Hannibal ever had to suture, but he took his time. He wanted to make sure he didn't make any careless mistakes, as he needed Will to be perfectly patched up for later.

Later, when Hannibal would eat him.

As he threaded the needle through Will's skin, he wondered which part of Will he would eat first. Hannibal had given the notion quite a bit of thought, starting from the moment he first met Will in Jack's office. There was something about Will that called to Hannibal, something that marked him as special, something that demanded Hannibal treat him differently than his other pets.

He used to imagine cracking Will open, bending back his ribs to remove his heart and making a beautiful centerpiece complete with Sweet Williams and rosy pomegranates out of Will's chest. He used to imagine keeping Will in his basement for years, preserving his beauty and eating away at him little by little, so that Hannibal would never run out of his flesh.

Hannibal finished closing Will's wound and reached a hand up to brush a sweaty curl off Will's forehead. His fantasies of eating Will had evolved from those early days, and in fact,

they had almost entirely disappeared until quite recently. After Will got out of prison, Hannibal realized his desire to consume Will could be fulfilled with a different type of consumption, one where they would consume each other's minds instead of their bodies. For the first time in his life, Hannibal wanted someone to stand beside him as an equal, and share everything together in a mutual cycle of consumption and destruction.

When Will betrayed him, Hannibal had been denied his desires.

Now, unable to consume Will's mind and uninterested in consuming his body like a common pig's, Hannibal had one option left. He would eat his brain, the perfect crux of mind and body.

Hannibal brushed a thumb over Will's forehead and sighed. He truly did not want to devour Will in this way, but it was the last option he had. Hannibal loved Will, and if this was the only way he could have him, forever, then so be it. Will's brain was bewitching, and Hannibal would savor every bite.

He struggled to his feet, the injuries from Jack still quite fresh, and limped to Sogliato's pristine bathroom. There was a tub that would fit Will nicely, and as Hannibal ran the bath he also laid out the spare clothes for Will that he had brought. It wouldn't do to have Will all washed up for dinner only to be clad in wrinkled fabric.

When the bath was ready, Hannibal returned to the living area and gathered Will up in his arms. His breathing was even against Hannibal's chest, and he did not wake as Hannibal commanded his own aching muscles to carry Will into the bathroom. He set Will down gingerly on the floor against the tub and started removing his clothes.

Will's shirt was in tatters, but from the rest of his suit Hannibal could tell that the ensemble was high quality. It was expensive and most likely came from a tailor shop, which made Hannibal frown because Will was not one to buy expensive — let alone brand new — clothes. He must have acquired the suit just for this occasion.

He dressed up for Hannibal.

Hannibal closed his eyes and allowed himself a moment to hold the shredded remains of Will's shirt.

Why would Will dress up for him, in a suit that he knew would appeal directly to Hannibal's tastes? It must have been to hurt him even more, to tease him before Will attempted to kill him.

Suddenly, the moment where he first laid eyes on Will again in the Uffizi Gallery seemed more bitter than sweet.

"Clever, cruel boy," Hannibal whispered.

He sighed and stripped away Will's remaining clothing clinically, respectfully averting his eyes as he removed his lower garments. Once Will was fully naked, Hannibal stood and collected Will in his arms again, this time gently depositing him into the warm water of the tub.

As soon as Will's bloodied skin touched the water, his eyes fluttered and he groaned. Hannibal did not react and simply finished positioning Will in the bath so that his entire body, except his head, was submerged in the soapy water. It was not surprising that Will clawed his way back to consciousness, but Hannibal had hoped to have a bit more time with the most peaceful version of him.

"Don't worry," Hannibal murmured. "I'm cleaning the blood off you."

Will's eyes opened halfway and he lolled his head down to look at himself in the tub, the most movement he was allowed by the drugs coursing through his system.

"Issa bad 'scuse," Will slurred. "You jus' want me naked."

Hannibal chuckled softly and began to wipe his dirty face with a washcloth. "You are quite beautiful, Will."

Will's eyes slipped closed again and his lips quirked with the ghost of a smile. Hannibal ran a thumb over the corner of his mouth, then sighed and dragged the washcloth to his neck and collarbone. He did not really want to have a conversation with Will right now, given the low likelihood that he would remember it. Hannibal knew how much Will loathed losing time.

He was grateful that Will did not say much, and the silence stretched over them more comfortably than expected. Hannibal continued to wash Will's body, and Will only let out a small moan when Hannibal ran the washcloth over the newly-stitched bullet wound. Hannibal allowed himself a tiny smile. He would've liked to hear Will's moans of pleasure, but he would value the moans of pain if they were the only ones freely given.

"I missssssed you," Will mumbled.

Hannibal paused his washing, eyes filling with tears. "I missed you too, dear boy."

Will hummed and leaned his head back against the edge of the tub. Hannibal took a deep breath, and blinked the tears out of his eyes. He was glad to know that Will missed him, even if it was just because he wanted to find and kill him.

He was also glad to have this moment, with Will docile and loopy. It wasn't his present vulnerability that Hannibal valued, but rather the fact that he was completely bare for Hannibal to see. Will had always been unquantifiable, an intriguingly complicated puzzle that Hannibal wanted to solve. Over the few years they had known each other, Hannibal had worked tirelessly to reveal all those beautifully unique pieces that made up Will.

Seeing him now, exposed and open, Hannibal felt as if he solved a tiny piece of that puzzle. He treasured every second he had with Will, and he was grateful to share this soft, intimate moment with him.

It was another opportunity to know each other fully, to see each other clearly. Will saw him, and now Hannibal saw Will. He wished he had more opportunities to be this naked with Will — he wished for an entire lifetime of them — but Will didn't want it.

I let you know me. See me. I gave you a rare gift, but you didn't want it.

Didn't I?

Hannibal took another breath and gently cleaned the blood from Will's fingers. Those words from Will had haunted him for months, but now they just brought him pain. If Will truly wanted him, wanted what they had, then he wouldn't have tried to kill Hannibal the first time they saw each other again.

Hannibal sighed and set the washcloth aside, now finished with cleaning his beloved, but Will frowned.

"Why'd ya stop?" he slurred.

"You're clean now," Hannibal replied. "It's time to get out."

"Hm… time for supper?"

Hannibal paused, his hand frozen mid-air where it was reaching for a towel. That was the first time he'd heard Will slip up and use the word "supper" instead of dinner before, and he relished in its use. Will had always been very careful to regulate his speech so as to not slip into his Southern accent and language, but in his disoriented state of mind it spilled over. Hannibal could hardly tell his accent through the slurring of his words, but he could clearly make out the actual words spoken.

Hearing Will be his authentic self, albeit in an intoxicated state, sent a pang through Hannibal's heart. It was moments like these that he wished for more than anything, but Will's word choice in his question infused pain into Hannibal's answer.

"Yes," he whispered. "It's almost time."

Time for Hannibal to use his bone saw to cut Will's skull open and cook his brain.

Time for dinner.

Hannibal hoisted Will out of the tub and onto the pile of his dirty clothes. Sogliato did not own a bathmat or anything of the sort, so Hannibal was reduced to reusing Will's special suit to keep him comfortable. Hannibal wished he would've kept Sogliato alive just so he could have killed him in that moment.

Will groaned as Hannibal dried him off but didn't say anything until Hannibal started dressing him in the clothes he had brought. He got the underwear and pants on first, to preserve Will's dignity, and as he started buttoning up the white shirt, Will opened his eyes and frowned.

"New clothes?" he muttered. "Wait… Givin' me a bath…"

Hannibal frowned as well, not knowing what thoughts were being strung together in Will's fuzzy mind. He finished buttoning up the shirt and went to empty the tub.

"We finally runnin' 'way together?" Will gasped behind him, hopeful.

Hannibal gripped the porcelain edge of the tub and allowed a single tear to escape. It felt like his heart shattered with that one, innocent question.

It hurt because they *had* a chance to run away together. Multiple chances, in fact. Hannibal had set up the apartment in Florence planning to take Will there. The master bedroom was complete with clothes for them both and Hannibal even bought that awful aftershave Will insisted on wearing. Hannibal also brought their forged papers along with Will's clothes in his bag, still hoping that Will may want to take a chance on him.

But Will had rejected him eight months ago, and he had rejected him again today. No matter what nonsense he was spewing now, Will made his choice. Now Hannibal had to follow

through with his own.

"No, Will," he forced out, stiffly. "We're going to dinner."

He turned and was met with Will's fallen expression.

"Oh. 'Kay," he mumbled, closing his eyes again.

Hannibal took a deep breath and pulled himself back together. Everything in him was fighting the plan to eat Will's brain, but he had to stand firm in his conviction. He had to follow through with his plans, but… that didn't mean anyone else had to.

Hannibal nodded once, leaned down to lift Will once again, and carried him into the dining area. He deposited Will into the chair at the head of the table with a huff of exertion, and reached for the nearby medical-grade straps to secure Will. Once Will was safely pinned to his chair, Hannibal brushed some curls off his forehead again.

"I will be right back," he murmured.

Will gave him a lopsided smile. "Okie dokie."

Hannibal smiled sadly at him and used his hand in Will's hair to bring their faces closer. He tilted Will's head up and kissed his forehead gently, savoring his taste and inhaling the scent of him. Hannibal would never overstep and kiss Will on the mouth without his consent, but he couldn't resist pressing his lips to at least one spot on Will's body.

Finally, Hannibal exhaled shakily and pulled back but Will surprised him by making a frustrated noise and tilting his head up. If Hannibal didn't know better, he'd think Will was chasing his touch.

Hannibal pushed the ridiculous thought out of his mind and placed his hand on Will's shoulder.

"I will return," he repeated.

Will made another indecipherable noise but Hannibal shuffled back to the bathroom, removing his burner phone from his pocket as he went. The moment he shut the door he just stood in place, staring at the large tub for a long beat, before he sighed and dialed a number he hadn't dialed in a long time. After a few rings the call connected with a crackle.

"Yes?" Chiyoh answered.

"Thank you for your protection," Hannibal greeted. "I am pleased to see you."

"You're welcome," Chiyoh responded dryly. "I thought you would be."

Hannibal smiled slightly. "If I may ask one more favor?"

"You may."

"Do not interfere," Hannibal requested. "By all means continue to watch over me, but no matter what you see, do not interfere."

Chiyoh was silent for a second. "Not even to save your life?"

"Even then."

He could hear Chiyoh swallow over the phone. "If you wish."

“I do. Thank you, Chiyoh. It would also be best if you lost your phone,” Hannibal said, then hung up.

He wasn’t completely sure what was going to happen during his dinner with Will, but he knew the noose around his throat was closing. Jack was here, the *polizia* were now informed, and Verger’s men were most certainly closing in. He was going through with his plans, but he was also polite enough to let others go through with theirs.

Hannibal cleaned himself up and changed into the only clean clothes he had left, as the ones he was wearing were soaked with water, sweat, and Will’s blood. He felt a bit better when he looked in the mirror to see himself, still battered and bruised, but refreshed and presentable for dinner.

He exited the bathroom and glanced at Will. The younger man was right where Hannibal left him, restrained to the chair, but now his eyes were closed and his breathing was more even. It seemed as if the drug had taken him once again.

Hannibal strode past Will and into Sogliato’s terrible excuse for a kitchen, quickly whipping up a little something that would improve Will’s taste. Hannibal was positive that Will would taste naturally delectable, but he had eaten brain before and it wasn’t his favorite cut of meat. Hannibal thought he would slice Will’s brain and fry each piece in front of him, so that Will could witness their intimate joining. He wondered which slice it would be before Will finally lost enough blood and his brain ceased to function.

Hannibal did not want to think about that, because the loss of Will’s brain — the loss of *Will* — was without doubt a terrible tragedy. If only it wasn’t unavoidable.

Hannibal finished the herb infusion and sighed. He would slice off the frontal lobe first, so as to preserve Will’s vital bodily functions. He would work slowly, and hopefully the police would not be too incompetent to find him before Will was lost forever.

His plan now clarified, Hannibal let the infusion sit on the stove as he got busy positioning three place settings on the dining table. One for Will, at the head of the table. One for

Hannibal, at his right hand. One for Jack, at the end of the table, if he was smart enough to figure out where Hannibal was in time for dinner.

Hannibal walked back to the kitchen, transferring the infusion into an ornate ceramic pot and carrying it to the dining table. As he approached Will and placed the pot down, he noticed that Will's eyes were now open and appeared to be a bit more lucid than before. Hannibal tightened his restraints to be sure he wouldn't escape, and joined Will at the table.

He took a moment to simply look at Will. If Hannibal had his way, then this was the last time he would be able to do so. He found that words were perched on the tip of his tongue, wanting to make themselves known in the face of the end.

"I don't indulge much in regret," Hannibal started softly, "but I am sorry to be leaving Italy."

He sighed and scooped up the first spoonful of herb infusion. "There were things in the *Palazzo Capponi* I would have liked to read."

Hannibal brought the spoon to his mouth, blowing slightly on the hot liquid to cool it, then held it out to Will. "I would have liked to play the clavier, or perhaps compose."

Will tried to turn away, but his muscles were still sluggish and Hannibal gently gripped his jaw and fed him the first spoonful of the infusion. Hannibal lowered the spoon and examined Will's face, still overwhelmingly beautiful even with the bruises — or perhaps more so because of them.

"I would have liked to show you Florence, Will," Hannibal confessed in a whisper.

Hannibal could imagine it clearly, since he had been imagining it for months. He and Will, strolling down the old, magnificent streets of Florence hand-in-hand, simply being together. Florence was home to so many things Hannibal loved, and he would have liked to add one more thing to that collection. He would have liked to show Will the things that inspired him in his youth, the places he loved to draw, the art he admired most.

He wanted to share with Will and show him everything, but Will didn't want it.

"The soup isn't very good," Will mumbled.

Hannibal was unable to keep his lips from curving upwards into a smile. He loved Will's wit just as much as he loved every other part of him, and he was happy he was able to experience it one last time.

"It's a parsley and thyme infusion," Hannibal responded. "More for my sake than yours. Have another sip."

He fed Will another spoonful. "Let that circulate."

In true form, Will surprised him by not fighting the second mouthful. He took it easily; not a drop spilled.

"Are we expecting company?" Will slurred, eyeing the extra place setting.

Hannibal hummed, scooping another spoonful. "An invitation was given. We will see if it is accepted."

Will leaned his head back against the chair, probably an attempt to cope with the disorientation. "Jack?"

"Indeed," Hannibal murmured. He fed Will another sip of the infusion then turned his face towards the door as he caught a familiar scent.

"It appears my invitation was accepted," he told Will. "You've had a fair amount of the infusion, and now it is time to prepare for our guest."

Will mumbled incoherently and Hannibal stood to return the pot to the kitchen. He traded it out for a pan and the portable stove he managed to find in the back of one of Sogliato's cabinets, and returned to the dining room to set up. He also retrieved Will's knife from the table, and cleaned up his surgical supplies. Satisfied that everything was ready, Hannibal fetched some butter and started melting it in the pan.

"Whassa smell?" Will slurred.

"It's butter, Will. Intended to provide a subtle base for frying food."

"Oh," Will mumbled. "Finally gon' eat me?"

Hannibal set the butter down and sighed, ignoring the ache in his heart. "I fear so, dear Will."

Will closed his eyes and turned his head away, leaving Hannibal with the distinct impression that he was being ignored. He smiled fondly and dropped to his knees, shimmying under the table to wait for Jack to arrive.

The wait wasn't long. He heard the door open with a soft click and Jack's smell wafted into the apartment, tarnishing the scent of the butter. Hannibal remained under the table as Jack's footsteps grew steadily closer, until eventually they came to a stop right next to Will's chair.

"Will," Jack whispered urgently.

There was a slight pause, then Hannibal heard Will respond just as quietly.

"He's under the table, Jack."

With Will's perfect announcement, Hannibal grabbed onto Jack's ankle and slashed his Achilles heel in one precise motion. Jack fell back with a shout and, unable to walk and

distracted by the pain, didn't have time to react before Hannibal slithered out from under the table, kicked the gun away, and wrapped his hands tight around his throat.

After Jack faded away to unconsciousness, Hannibal dragged him to the chair opposite Will and set up an IV. He was only administering a short-term paralytic, and the drug would need to be given continuously to be effective. Hannibal completed his task in a matter of minutes, and gave Jack a little slap to rouse him before heading back to add some herbs to the browning butter.

"I've taken the liberty of giving you something to help you relax," Hannibal explained as Jack blinked back to consciousness. "Won't be able to do much more than chew, but that's all you need to do."

Jack really was quite easy to neutralize. Part of Hannibal wished that he put up more of a fight, but he supposed he'd have to rely on Verger's men to stop him now. Part of him, albeit a small part, was salivating at the promise of eating Will.

"I didn't have an opportunity to ask you during our last encounter, but did you enjoy the exhibition?" Hannibal asked lightly. "A different kind of evil minds museum."

"Not that different," Jack murmured.

Hannibal tilted his head, conceding the point.

"We were supposed to sit down together at your house in Baltimore," Jack said. "Just the three of us."

"You were to be the guest of honor," Hannibal quipped.

"But the menu was all wrong," Will uttered.

Hannibal smiled at him, glad to see that his sense was returning. “Yes, it was.”

He retrieved the box containing his surgical bone saw and turned back to Will. “Jack was the first to suggest getting inside your head. Now we both have the opportunity to chew, quite literally, what we’ve only chewed figuratively.”

Hannibal took his time assembling the bone saw, and only when he finished did he allow himself to look at Will.

Hannibal could only hope that his face did not reflect the wave of emotions that he willingly unleashed as he gazed at the man he loved. Will always had the power to make Hannibal experience feelings — experience *life* — more profoundly, and this was no exception.

Hannibal’s entire body ached with sentiments he rarely faced: sorrow, yearning, and regret. Hannibal rarely felt regret, but in this moment he wished he could have done things differently, if it meant earning him just a shred more time spent with Will.

“Hannibal…” Jack warned.

Hannibal ignored him and turned on the saw. This moment was for Jack to witness, not to experience. This moment was an intimate one, for him and Will only. If undisturbed, this would be their last moment together.

Hannibal closed his eyes, breathed, and opened them to meet Will’s beautiful ocean-blue eyes. They were still clouded with the drug, and although Hannibal would have liked Will to be completely cogent for this, he could settle for this version since it meant that Will would feel minimal pain.

With no further reason for hesitation, Hannibal lifted the buzzing saw and touched it to the right side of Will’s forehead.

Immediately, Will's skin opened up and blood started pouring and spraying. Hannibal did not press too deeply or move too quickly; a last effort to delay Will's death. He was cutting Will open with the intention of killing him, unlike the last time he sliced into Will, but Hannibal still clung to any excuse that would delay what he knew he had to do.

Hannibal didn't *want* to do this, but one doesn't always get what one wants.

He was vaguely aware of Jack screaming, but his focus was entirely on Will in the chair, jerking under Hannibal's hands. Blood was dripping into Will's eyes and onto his shirt, painting a beautiful picture in a swath of red. The high-pitched buzzing of the saw did nothing to mask Will's little gasps of pain, and Hannibal relished each one like an offering.

Suddenly, when the bone saw was about halfway across Will's forehead, the door banged open and men with guns swarmed in. Hannibal immediately removed the saw and powered it down, taking a deep breath. For the first time in his life, he was happy to leave his artwork unfinished.

"*Sono un ufficiale del FBI*," Jack asserted loudly. "*Ascoltami. Mi chiamo Jack Crawford.*"

Hannibal leveled his gaze at the man who seemed to be in charge and calmly placed the bloodied saw on the table.

"*Sono un ufficiale del FBI!* " Jack insisted. "*Ascoltami! Ascoltami!* "

Hannibal put his hands up without prompting and slowly dropped to his knees.

"*Ascoltami… Commendatore* Benetti," Jack said with recognition. "Don't imagine you're here to make an arrest."

"No," Benetti chuckled. "You imagine correctly."

Hannibal laced his hands behind his head. It seemed Mason Verger had bought his way into the *Questura di Firenze,* in spite of Hannibal's slaying of Rinaldo Pazzi.

With a nod from Benetti, the man behind Hannibal stepped forward and bludgeoned him, hard, on the back of the head. Hannibal was gone before he hit the floor.

His last thought before blacking out was that he hoped Will would join him on his travels to Muskrat Farm.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts??

I'm almost certainly going to split Digestivo in half too, and those chapters will take me a while because there's just so much missing scenes I need to write haha! Follow me on twitter for exclusive sneak peeks :)

Digestivo Part 1

Chapter Notes

The long awaited transport scene is here!! Ever wondered what happened in that long plane ride from Italy to the Verger Farm?? Wonder no longer :)

This chapter also includes Will going feral and Hannibal having heart eyes <3

There are a lot of feelings and introspection in this monster of an episode so of course I had to split it again! But this first half is like 7k words hahaha so enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke up with his head killing him. He groaned, becoming aware of other aches in his body as he blinked open his eyes and tried to figure out where he was.

He had a headache, probably from dehydration and the drugs Hannibal gave him, but his head was also throbbing with sharp pain. He was confused for a second about the source of that particular ache, but then his mind rebooted and he vaguely remembered Hannibal sawing into his head and Jack screaming.

Hannibal had really tried to kill him this time, and he would've if Mason Verger's men hadn't interrupted him.

Will didn't remember anything else, and he hated it.

His body was in agony from all it had been through in the last few days, and Will tried to readjust to find a more comfortable position. It was only then that he realized he was lying on a cold, metal surface that was softly vibrating. He couldn't move his arms out from where they were uncomfortably squished under his back, and the feeling of something thin digging into his wrists suggested that his hands had been bound with a zip tie. Will grunted and looked around blearily, seeing a variety of crates and boxes crammed into a long, but thin, metal space.

It was the cargo hold of an airplane.

“Just like pigs,” Will muttered, squirming around to prop himself up in a sitting position.

“Quite right,” a prim voice said behind Will.

Will groaned in annoyance and scooted himself around so that he was propped against a crate right across from Hannibal. Because of the poor lighting, he could just make out the bruised side of Hannibal’s face and the positioning of his body, sat up against the metal wall of the cargo hold with his hands restrained behind him, just like Will.

He noticed that Hannibal was wearing something different than what he was at the Uffizi gallery. Will glanced down to his own clothes and held back another groan. His nice suit from Prague was gone, probably lost forever, and in its place were black slacks and a white dress shirt streaked with blood.

He didn’t remember changing, and rationally knew that there was no way he changed his own clothes in his intoxicated state. Still, Will refused to consider the only alternative.

“How long have we been here?” Will huffed out.

He really did not want to talk to Hannibal about anything right now, but he did want to know how much longer he was going to be stuck in a dark, cold cargo hold of a plane with him. Will didn’t know if he could handle an extended amount of time with the man who just tried to saw open his skull.

“I regained consciousness right as they were loading us in, and that was about two hours ago,” Hannibal answered. “Since it is about a 10-hour flight to Baltimore, I estimate that we have eight hours left.”

Will sighed and tilted his head back against the hard wooden crate. That's just great. Eight hours stuck in a plane with Hannibal Lecter.

"Do you think they'll fly us into Baltimore?" Will wondered. "Knowing Mason, he'll probably fly us straight to a private airfield right outside the estate."

Hannibal hummed. "Even so, the flight time would virtually be the same."

Will chewed his lip. "I assume you've already tried to get out of these restraints. Verdict?"

"Mason's men know what they're doing. They are too tight to get out of alone, and even if we tried to help each other, I fear that we can't break the plastic without a tool."

"Your sharp teeth won't work?" Will asked sardonically.

Hannibal smiled. "If we were bound with rope, they would. I'm afraid my teeth meet their limit at hard plastic."

"Ugh. Okay." Will closed his eyes, intending to do his best to ignore Hannibal for eight hours. God knew he needed some actual sleep, and Will usually slept through flights anyway.

Of course, Hannibal fucking Lecter wouldn't make things so easy.

"Could you give me a verbal report of your injuries?" Hannibal inquired clinically.

"Could you shut up?" Will sniped back, opening his eyes to glare at Hannibal.

Hannibal just looked amused, which caused the anger that had been simmering inside Will to boil over.

“In the past 48 hours, I have been pushed off a train, shot, drugged, and had my skull sawed open. By *you*,” Will snarled. “You just tried to kill me, so stop pretending you care. Drop the kind doctor act, and shut the fuck up.”

Hannibal blinked slowly.

“Those two things are not mutually exclusive,” he finally replied.

He did not elaborate, but Will knew exactly what he meant. It was possible to care about someone and want to kill them at the same time.

Hannibal’s eyes burned into him, daring Will to disagree. But Will would not take the bait, because he did not disagree. He knew, more than most, what it was like to feel those conflicting emotions.

Still, that did not mean Will was not pissed at Hannibal. He was incredibly angry, and that anger stemmed from being deeply wounded. Will had never seriously tried to kill Hannibal, although he thought about it over and over again. Likewise, Hannibal had never actually tried to kill Will. Until a few hours ago.

The blinding hurt and anger Will felt now was comparable to how he felt when he woke up in the hospital eight months ago, gutted and abandoned.

He really didn’t want to continue talking to Hannibal, but even his pride could not contain the desperate words that burst out of his chest. “Why the fuck did you try to kill me *now?* Why didn’t you just kill me that night in your kitchen?”

Hannibal sighed. “I was heartbroken that night, Will, but I did not want you dead. I wanted you to suffer, as I had suffered.”

“That doesn’t answer my question,” Will growled. “Why now?”

Why? Why, after their intimate moment in the Uffizi Gallery together? Why, after Will just tried to even the scales between them? Why, when Will said he forgave Hannibal?

Will was angry, he was hurt, and he was afraid. He was afraid that Hannibal tried to kill him because he realized that, after all these months apart, he didn’t want to be connected to Will anymore.

“I was considering it as a possibility for some time, but I truly settled on that course of action after you tried to kill me first,” Hannibal said stiffly. “It really shouldn’t be that surprising, Will.”

Suddenly, Will’s depressing thoughts screeched to a halt. “Wait, what?”

“You made it incredibly clear that you wanted nothing to do with me after you tried to stab me in broad daylight, so I decided the only way to keep you with me was to eat you,” Hannibal continued. “I had hoped you would choose to stay with me after you squandered the first chance, but I see now that I was foolish to wish for something so far-fetched.”

“Hold on,” Will spat out. “*What?* ”

Hannibal looked at him sharply. “What is so difficult to understand?”

“Your fucking thought process!” Will snapped. “It sounds very rational, *Dr. Lecter*, but you got the premise wrong. I never tried to kill you.”

Hannibal frowned. “I distinctly remember you — ”

“Yes, I tried to stab you, but it wasn’t to kill you,” Will snarled, getting pissed again. “I just wanted to *forgive* you like you forgave me — with a deep scar. Couldn’t figure that one out?”

Dumbass, Will thought as he caught his breath and leaned back against the crate. He had been hunched forward as he hissed at Hannibal, the movement straining his muscles painfully, and he let out a pained exhale as he readjusted to get more comfortable.

Hannibal looked a little shocked but, true to form, recovered quickly. “Well then, you should have been clear about your intentions.”

Will scoffed. “The entire point of stabbing you was to catch you off guard. Telling you what I was going to do would have defeated the entire purpose.”

Will wanted to scar Hannibal, but only in the right way. If Hannibal knew, and let Will do that to him, then it wouldn’t have meant anything. Will wanted to surprise him, to *earn* the right to scar the pristine Hannibal Lecter.

“You catch me off guard all the time,” Hannibal said quietly.

Will furrowed his brow and purposefully remained silent. Hannibal had lost his fire the moment Will explained his design, and even apologized in his own roundabout way. Will had no idea what to make of an apologetic Hannibal, let alone an emotionally honest one. Will didn’t know if he could trust him, after everything, but he didn’t think Hannibal was lying.

It was the high likelihood of Hannibal being honest right now that made Will feel distinctly uncomfortable.

He kept quiet for a while, letting the tension between them decrease with the silence. Will could admit that ignoring Hannibal was also a way for him to scrape back some power. The power in their relationship was constantly fought over with the rhythmic push and pull of a violent tug-of-war, and this is Will’s way of taking it back from Hannibal after he stole it with the bone saw.

Will sighed and turned his head to the side, the cool wood feeling refreshing against his throbbing forehead. He thought he had his feelings about Hannibal organized and processed,

but seeing him again and the shitshow that followed destroyed that belief. He had nothing handled, and he wasn't sure if he ever would. Hannibal inspired so much in Will that it all got mixed together, making it extremely difficult for Will to figure out who he was, what he wanted, and what he was going to do.

It was all starting to get so tiring.

Will pressed his forehead harder into the wooden crate, then paused. His cut wasn't opening up under the pressure, and it didn't feel like it hit the bone. He glanced at Hannibal and frowned.

"...My cut isn't that deep."

Hannibal's gaze flickered to his forehead and remained there a beat too long before dropping down to make eye contact.

"Ideally in a craniotomy, the patient's outer layer of skin would be peeled back first, thus allowing for better penetration when cutting into the skull — "

"OKAY! Fuck, I got it. Shouldn't have asked," Will muttered.

He should've known that Hannibal was just trying to do the operation correctly. He hated himself for the sliver of hope he felt along with the semi-shallow cut on his skin. It would most certainly scar, but his skull itself was not touched. For a second, Will hoped that was because Hannibal had second thoughts about killing him, but with his answer he made it abundantly clear that was not the case.

His mind flashed with images of Hannibal cutting him open and he pushed them away forcefully, anger starting to grow again with the hurt he was feeling. The images changed, settling on when Will was sprawled out on the couch and Hannibal was helping him out of his jacket in order to suture his bullet wound. Will remembered Hannibal guiding him into a gentle embrace, his hand brushing the back of his hair. The incredible pain from being touched so gently only for it to inevitably be paired with violence — *again* — made Will see red.

“I should’ve known you would only touch me so gently when you were planning on cutting me open,” Will growled to himself.

He was only aware that he said that out loud when he heard Hannibal’s barely audible inhale.

“I wasn’t aware that you wanted me to be gentle with you,” Hannibal breathed.

Will started, embarrassed that he slipped up and said something so vulnerable out loud, and stubbornly ignored Hannibal to glare at a box. He hated that Hannibal made him feel so angry and hurt that he couldn’t control his actions, he hated that Hannibal wasn’t scarred, he hated that his deepest bond with another human being was with a cannibalistic serial killer.

Most of all, Will hated the fact that he didn’t really hate Hannibal at all.

“Will,” Hannibal called softly.

Will met his eyes automatically and found them full of something that, in anyone other than Hannibal Lecter, Will would label as tender regret. All the rage rushed out of Will at once, leaving him with a dull, raw ache.

“I have performed many craniotomies in my time as a surgeon,” he murmured quietly, “but never before have I intentionally slowed the procedure in the hope that it would be interrupted, or treated the patient so gently.”

“Shut up,” Will whispered, forcefully breaking their eye contact by looking away. Hannibal fell silent but his words still echoed in the cold, dark space between them, invading Will’s heart like a thousand knives.

He desperately needed something else to focus on, and his mind clutched at the most obvious thing.

“You should’ve killed Mason when you had the chance,” he blurted out. “Now we’re going to die after being tortured by that sadist.” No *gentleness* there.

Hannibal hummed. “I am quite content with how Mason Verger made himself useful in recent events, thus I cannot say I regret leaving him alive.”

Will scoffed and continued to ignore Hannibal’s stare.

“Perhaps *you* should have killed him when you had the chance, if you feel so strongly about it,” Hannibal said lightly.

“Perhaps I should’ve,” Will sneered.

He could practically *feel* Hannibal’s pleased smile and groaned, suddenly physically and emotionally exhausted. With nothing to distract from it, the pain in Will’s entire body was almost unbearable. His injuries from getting thrown off the train, being shot, and getting his head sawed into all culminated into making his body one big, open wound. He also realized that he was shivering, likely as a result of blood loss.

Will considered his options as best he could with the lack of blood running through his brain, and sighed heavily. He needed to sleep, he needed to stay warm, and he needed to distract himself from the awful pain. Right now, there was only one way to do that.

He fought with himself until a violent shiver wracked his exhausted body, and he gave in. Carefully pushing off against the crate, Will maneuvered himself to his side and inched forward until his head bumped into Hannibal’s knee.

“Don’t fucking say anything,” Will warned.

Hannibal obeyed but didn't hide his sudden intake of breath.

Will squirmed around until he was moderately comfortable, head in Hannibal's lap. His touch made the pain drift away just enough so that Will felt the promise of sleep wash over him and he closed his eyes, grateful to get some actual rest before the next time someone tried to kill him.

Hannibal held his breath as Will drifted off to sleep, injured head resting in the nook of his crossed legs.

He could scarcely believe it was happening. He had just tried to kill and eat Will, a fact that Will was all too aware of, but here he was, sleeping in Hannibal's lap. Vulnerable. Trusting.

It was a gift, and much more than Hannibal deserved.

He had never felt as shocked as he did when Will informed him that he did not intend to kill him outside the Uffizi. Will had shared his violent fantasies about killing Hannibal before, so naturally Hannibal assumed that he had finally given into those urges. He had never thought that Will simply wanted to scar him — but then again, perhaps Will felt the same when Hannibal scarred him?

When Will asked about that night in Baltimore, he sounded confused as to why Hannibal hadn't just killed him then. Hannibal had thought about it, of course, but a life without Will wasn't truly what he wanted. He just wanted to hurt Will, like Will had hurt him.

It seemed as if Will had similar feelings.

When Hannibal thought about it that way, it made perfect sense. They were just alike, after all. Two sides of the same coin. The reason Hannibal never expected Will to match his behavior was simply because he thought he pushed Will too far. Slitting Abigail's throat in front of him was quite cruel, and the last time Hannibal killed someone close to Will, he had lashed out and tried to kill Hannibal.

Hannibal very much expected that Will's reaction this time would be the same; a belief solidified when Will pulled the knife on him. But Hannibal realized now, quite fondly, that he never should have thought he could predict Will.

Will never failed to surprise him. Hannibal looked forward to the day when Will got his wish and bested Hannibal in a fight, carving his blade deep into Hannibal's skin. He imagined a fight between them would be raw and bloody, potentially the most intimate thing either of them had experienced. The prospect of them both being physically marked by each other excited Hannibal.

He genuinely hoped Will got his wish. As a natural optimist, Hannibal was quite confident that they would squeeze their way out of the current situation. Perhaps he could manipulate Margot into releasing them.

Whatever the future held, Hannibal was content to let it play out. He was too preoccupied with the present moment, with Will sleeping soundly against him.

As he stared down at Will's battered and bloody but peaceful face, Hannibal felt a rare twinge of remorse. He didn't truly want to kill and eat Will in the first place, but now, after knowing of his intentions, Hannibal found himself incredibly grateful that he had been stopped.

Suddenly, Hannibal noticed that Will's peaceful slumber was interrupted by a series of shivers. He grumbled in his sleep, automatically trying to get closer to Hannibal, and Hannibal realized that Will must be quite cold from the amount of blood loss he had suffered. He wished he could take Will in his arms and run his fingers through his unruly curls, but alas his hands were bound. He doubted that Will would allow him to either, even if they were not.

As it was, Hannibal carefully rearranged himself to best provide Will with the maximum amount of body heat. He gently uncrossed his legs to push Will's head out of his lap and slithered down to press against him, tangling their legs together. He nudged Will's head against his chest and noticed that, with the increased amount of body heat between them, his face had once again evened out and his shivers had abated.

Hannibal nodded, pleased. By his estimate they had about seven hours of flight time left; an acceptable amount of sleep to refresh Will's body. Hannibal himself only needed a few hours of sleep every night, and he decided to be productive by closing his eyes to get some right now. He was still wounded from his fight with Jack, and he wanted to regain his strength.

He would need it once Verger's men opened the cargo hold to transport them to Muskrat farm.

Hannibal succeeded in resting for a few hours, and was pleased to see Will still fast asleep beside him when he opened his eyes. Hannibal's gaze softened as he stared at Will's peaceful face, and he wished he could wake up to the sight more often. Every day, if he had his choice.

He wanted Will spread out on his bed, brown hair splayed across cobalt blue sheets that matched his eyes. He wanted to actually have use of his hands, and brush the stray curls away from Will's forehead or lay an arm around his waist. He wanted to wake up after a late night, and bring Will breakfast in bed.

Hannibal continued to stare at Will and imagine the future he'll likely never have until he felt the plane begin its descent. He immediately began to extricate himself from where he was tangled together with Will, slowly so as not to wake him, and inched his way toward the opening of the cargo hold. He positioned himself near the side, just behind the unfolding door, so that he had the element of surprise whenever it opened.

He managed to get to his feet and brace himself right as the plane touched down, the landing feeling much too bumpy and uneven for an official airport runway. Will had been correct, then. They were to be kept out of official flight records and brought to Mason Verger as soon as possible.

A few moments after the plane came to a complete stop, Hannibal heard voices outside the cargo hold. He lowered himself into a crouch, and watched with sharp eyes as the door began to drop open.

The moment the cargo hold door fully descended upon the snowy runway and about a dozen armed men came into view, Hannibal leapt from his hiding place with a snarl. He tore the throat out of the closest man easily, swallowing his surprised cry. Blood coating his mouth, he whirled to the side and attacked again, slamming his skull against another man's. He bared

his teeth and side-stepped a third man who tried to punch him, determined to send each man down with his hands tied behind his back.

Will was sleeping in the plane behind him, and Hannibal wouldn't let anyone touch him.

He was too preoccupied with defeating the men in front of him that he didn't notice what was going on behind him until a gruff voice yelled, "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Hannibal quickly turned to politely inform the soon-dead man that he would *not* shoot, as Mason Verger very much wanted him alive, and froze.

Will was blinking back at him, a thick hand wrapped around his neck and a gun held flush against his temple.

"They told us to bring you alive, but this one is expendable," the man holding Will grunted. "Stop, or I'll kill him."

Hannibal met Will's eyes and nodded, once.

Immediately, he was tackled onto the cold, snowy ground and rope was wrapped around his ankles. Then he was hauled up and carried to a nearby truck, the Verger emblem emblazoned on the side. The back of the truck was open to reveal racks of pigs hanging upside down, and Hannibal smiled. He turned to lock eyes with Will, wanting to share his amusement. The pigs' experience, indeed.

It took three men each to haul Hannibal and Will up by their ankles and hang them next to the pigs. The man who held a gun to Will's head looked them over once and lingered on Hannibal's face.

"Clean him up," he growled. "Don't want Verger to know he took a few of our guys down."

Hannibal smiled as the blood was wiped from his face and neck, exposing his reddened teeth. Those were wiped clean too, although more hesitantly than the rest of him. Soon after, the truck was closed up and they were headed to Muskrat Farm.

The drive was not a particularly long one, but Hannibal was very mindful of Will's condition. He could only see Will out of the corner of his eye, and he did not look like he was handling all the blood rushing to his head well. Hannibal didn't expect him to, with how dehydrated he must be.

"Stay with me, Will," Hannibal grunted.

"Shut up," came Will's weak reply.

They swayed back and forth by their feet for a few more minutes before thankfully coming to a stop. The truck door was opened with a rough clang, and Hannibal was not at all surprised to see Mason Verger's unfortunate face sneering down at him.

"Gentlemen! Welcome to Muskrat Farm."

Hannibal was pleased to see that the skin grafts Mason had received did nothing to reconstruct his lips, forcing his words to come out like the croaking of some old, gnarled beast.

"Your people might have assassinated me in Florence, Mason," Hannibal suggested.

"Where's the fun in that?" Mason taunted. "I still keep my father's knife, ever ready to slip into a pig's back to check the depth of the fat."

He brandished his father's old knife, twirling it as well as he could with the nerve damage from the spinal injury Hannibal gave him. "Cordell, if you would."

The big, bald man at Mason's right hand, Cordell, stepped into the truck and dutifully spun Hannibal around. Hannibal's facial expression did not change as he felt Mason slowly insert the knife into his back, then remove it.

"A little lean, I think," Mason remarked. "Maybe we should fatten you up, shall we?"

The next moment, Hannibal was being removed from the rack and set on his feet again. He maintained eye contact with Mason as Will received the same treatment beside him, before being pushed forward and trapped into a stand-up wheelchair.

"Bandage him up," Mason ordered, nodding at Will. "Can't have him bleeding all over my pristine workstation."

Cordell obeyed and quickly bandaged Will's head, his cut having reopened from being hung upside down. Hannibal glanced at Will and expertly masked the concern he felt from seeing him so disoriented. As a doctor, he knew that Will would regain his sense after a few minutes as his blood evenly redistributed to his body and he had some water, but he was still a bit worried. He didn't trust Mason to treat either of them very well.

Mason wheeled himself away into the nearest building, and Hannibal and Will were pushed after him in the stand-up wheelchairs. They passed by a few pig pens before ending up in a room where a few individual pens were clustered in a circle around the room, and there were other pigs in containers hooked up to various IVs and machines along the walls. To Hannibal, the place looked like Mason's playroom.

"It's more trouble to move a semi-wild pig against its will than it is to kidnap a man," Mason declared.

"Pigs are harder to get hold of, and big ones are stronger than a man," Cordell agreed heartily.

Mason's eyes sparkled, and Hannibal imagined he might smile if he had lips. "There are the tusks to consider, if you want to maintain the integrity of your abdomen."

The entire procession came to a stop in the middle of the pig pen circle, and Hannibal and Will were shackled by their wheelchairs to the wooden pens directly behind them.

"Something worth maintaining, Mr. Graham," Mason addressed Will severely. "Tusked beasts instinctively disembowel."

To Hannibal's concern and amusement, Will looked entirely too groggy to understand whatever convoluted pig metaphor Mason was spewing.

"At swine fairs, I've seen exotic pigs from all over the world," Mason continued, whirring around to face Hannibal. "*You* are the best of all that I've seen."

Hannibal smiled.

"We are going to have some good, funny times, Dr. Lecter," Mason assured darkly.

"I look forward to it," Hannibal replied politely.

Mason scoffed and whirred back down the hallway they came from. "You'll both be joining me for dinner later, so make yourselves presentable. We'll start our good times then."

"Have them ready by 8 p.m. sharp," Cordell instructed the four guards that were left to watch over Hannibal and Will.

Once Mason and his entourage left, Hannibal took some time to fully catalogue his surroundings. The walls were red brick, and the floors were covered with a thin layer of hay. The smell was potent, but nothing Hannibal couldn't handle. Instead of a filthy pigsty, this room, as Hannibal noted earlier, appeared to be Mason's special room where he conducted various pig-related experiments.

Hannibal was interested in knowing the fine mechanics of Mason's ghoulish activities, and he wondered if any of his novice experiments were successful. Knowing the incompetence of Mason Verger, Hannibal suspected not.

He returned his gaze to Will and was not pleased to see that he was still looking incredibly disoriented.

"Excuse me," Hannibal addressed the guards politely. "May I request some water? I'm quite parched."

Three of the men ignored him, but the closest one to Hannibal narrowed his eyes. "You aren't allowed anything the boss doesn't approve."

"Ah, I understand. I'm to be the prize pig," Hannibal nodded. "In that case, may I at least insist on some water for my companion here? I was informed that your boss doesn't much care about him."

The guard hesitated for a moment before turning and walking out.

Hannibal allowed himself a small smile. He had missed playing with people, and it brought him immense satisfaction to do so now, at Will's benefit.

The man returned fairly quickly with a plastic water bottle and, with an annoyed glare in Hannibal's direction, held it up to Will's lips. Hannibal watched with secret relief as Will gulped the water down, draining the entire bottle in just under a minute. Once done, Will licked his lips and his eyes started to clear. He looked around as if just now noticing their surroundings, before his gaze stopped on Hannibal.

They stared at each other for an indiscernible amount of time, nothing in particular passing between them but just being content with their eye contact. Hannibal had nothing more beautiful to look at, anyway.

They did not speak, and although Hannibal wasn't entirely sure of the reason, he suspected it was because they were not alone. Will was always rather private, and although this quality was usually endearing, Hannibal worried about its current persistence. Although he was hopeful he could get them out of this situation, there was still a possibility that they would both die here. He did not know when they would be separated either, and this may be the last time they would be able to speak to each other without Mason Verger present.

Still, Will refused to talk.

Eventually, a couple of the guards left briefly and returned with clear garment bags containing exquisite suits. Hannibal's eyes gleamed at the sight, pleased that Mason decided to dress them up for dinner. Two guards each approached Hannibal and Will, one training a gun to their respective heads and the other in charge of changing them into the new clothes. The process of being stipped naked and redressed did not bother Hannibal, and when he glanced at Will after they were both newly clothed he was similarly detached.

Hannibal was sorry to see Will's bloodied white shirt go, but he was also enjoying the sight of him clad in a well-tailored suit. The design did not suit Will as well as the one he wore in the Uffizi Gallery, but it was still beautiful on him. Will's bandaged head and bruised face only added to his unparalleled beauty, and Hannibal gazed at him until the men wheeled them away.

Hannibal and Will were steered out of the pig warehouse and into the living quarters of the Verger estate. Hannibal looked around with interest as they were wheeled through the lavish rooms and into what must be the main dining room, judging by the wide variety of fresh food heaped upon the large table. Mason was already seated at the head of the table, and Hannibal was positioned at the opposite end whereas Will's wheelchair was settled on one side of the table, halfway between them.

The guards changed their wheelchairs from standing-up to sitting-down; an appropriate modification for the occasion. Hannibal tested out his hand restraints as he stared directly at Mason with a polite smile.

"I snatched Will Graham right out of your mouth," Mason mused. "You must be famished!"

A plate of fresh, raw Blue Point oysters were laid in front of Hannibal and he hummed. Oysters served to enhance one's flavor, and he was impressed that Mason knew this and ordered such high-quality ones.

"There is an inescapable parallel between you and Jezebel, Mason," Hannibal said lightly as he picked up his fork. "Keen Bible student that you are, you'll recall dogs ate Jezebel's face, along with the rest of her."

The parallel really was quite amusing. If only Will's dogs had eaten the rest of Mason along with his face.

"Well, if Jezebel was right with the risen Jesus, the Riz would have provided her with a new face, as He has provided mine," Mason replied, teasingly raising his eyebrows at Will.

Hannibal placed a delicious oyster in his mouth as Will frowned, piecing together the meaning behind Mason's words.

"The transplant surgery is extremely skillful," Mason continued, "which is why Cordell here will be providing the face-off."

Cordell placed the platter of food he just carried in onto the table and turned to smile at Will. "Hello."

Hannibal turned his attention back to Mason, intrigued at his plans.

"You boys remind me of that German cannibal who advertised for a friend, and then ate him and his penis before he died," Mason started.

Hannibal's lips quirked, already entertained.

“Tragedy being, the penis was overcooked. Go to all that trouble to eat a friend and you overcook his penis!” Mason lamented. “Well, they ate it anyway. They had to, they committed. But they didn’t enjoy it,” he remarked sadly.

“I’m committed to enjoying every *bite* of you,” Mason promised.

“You’re going to eat him… with my face?” Will clarified.

Hannibal ate another oyster in amusement.

“Yes. I got a taste for it after you two had me eat my nose,” Mason drawled.

Hannibal was pleased. He couldn’t imagine a better end than being eaten by Will’s Graham’s magnificent face.

“You must be terribly proud that you could bring this off,” Hannibal stated. “It’s dangerous to get exactly what you want.” He tilted his head to the side. “What will you do after you’ve eaten me?”

“You could wreck some foster homes and torment some children,” Will offered.

“No,” Mason assured. “I’ll drink martinis made with tears.”

“But where, Mason, would the hard-core fun come from?” Hannibal wondered.

Mason clicked his tongue in disapproval. “It’s foolish to dilute such ecstatic times as this with fears about the future. Oh, Cordell, Mr. Graham is looking very dry. A little moisturizer, please.”

“I’m curious, what will be the first cuts of me you’ll serve?” Hannibal asked.

Cordell walked to a small side table to retrieve some moisturizer and perked up at the question, turning to face Hannibal. “The first course, of course, will be your hands and feet, sizzling on a Promethean barbecue. The coal is white and very hard, makes a clear ringing sound when struck.”

Hannibal smiled at him in approval before looking back at Mason. “You’ve thought of everything.”

Mason inclined his head in mock humility. “And after that, we’ll have a little pajama party, you and I. You can be in shorties by then. Cordell is going to keep you alive for a very long time.”

Suddenly, as Cordell leaned over Will with a dab of cream, Will surged upwards and violently bit at his face. His teeth remained locked on Cordell’s cheek for a long moment before he abruptly tore them away, ripping flesh with them. Blood immediately spurted out of Cordell’s face and the man screamed in pain as Hannibal’s breath caught, gaze zeroed onto Will.

Will chewed something in his mouth before he leaned forward and spat out a piece of Cordell’s cheek onto his dinner plate.

Hannibal stared, absolutely entranced at the fresh blood smeared on Will’s mouth and dripping off his chin. Will looked down at his plate for a second before slowly turning to lock eyes with Hannibal.

Hannibal had no idea what expression was showing on his face and he didn’t care; in that moment, he dropped his person-suit for Will and simply gazed back at him with all the overwhelming love and pride that was rushing through his body. *My vicious, wild boy.*

“Well, no pajama party for you, Mr. Graham,” Mason chided grimly. “We’ll be feeding you to the pigs as soon as Cordell removes your *face* — in a much more civilized fashion than you just tried to remove his.”

With that, Mason jerked his head towards the guards who then retrieved Hannibal and changed his wheelchair to be standing-up again. Hannibal kept gazing at Will with incredible pride until his line of sight was broken and he was wheeled away from the man who never failed to surprise him.

Will yanked his head away from the wet rag that was being dragged across his mouth. He didn't want to be cleaned up, he wanted Cordell's blood to dry on his face, a visible reminder to Mason and the rest of the pigs that Will would not be played with. The guard attempting to remove the blood gave up at Will's growl, and looked at Mason in exasperation.

"Leave him," Mason dismissed. "Clean this up and let him sit in time-out. You've been naughty, Mr. Graham."

Will ignored him and stared into space as Mason whirred away and the dining table was cleared of all food and tableware. Will was still sitting there as the lights were turned off, and he was left alone.

That was just fine with Will. He preferred to be alone, if being with Hannibal wasn't an option anymore.

He thought about how Hannibal looked at him after he bit Cordell's cheek off. His expression was the softest it'd ever been, and Will was still tingling from the blatant pride radiating from his eyes. He didn't know what he thought about making Hannibal proud, but he sure knew how he felt about it. It felt undeniably *good.*

Will had to tear his eyes away from Hannibal's face after mere seconds of direct contact, for fear of smiling back at him. He was still angry at Hannibal for cutting his head open, and would not allow Hannibal the pleasure of his true feelings. He feared he already gave too much away by immediately looking at Hannibal for approval after tearing off Cordell's flesh.

Will sighed. He had enjoyed every second of the act, but wasn't that the problem? He wasn't *supposed* to.

But then Will remembered Hannibal's shining face again, and how Hannibal always wanted him to be proud of himself and embrace his instincts, and Will found it hard to be ashamed.

There was a sudden noise from the doorway and Will glanced up, doing a double-take at the sight of Alana Bloom.

"What are you doing here?" Will asked, more suspicious than surprised.

"I'm Mason Verger's psychiatrist," Alana answered seriously.

Will scoffed. "That part of his therapy, or yours?"

"I think we're all working through some issues," Alana replied, leaning on her cane as she walked to the nearest chair. "I'm putting an emphasis on self-preservation."

She sat down heavily. "Jack's alive."

"Good for Jack," Will mocked. He digested the new information that Alana was working with Mason now and considered how that played into current events.

"You helped Mason Verger find us," Will accused.

Alana looked incredulous. "I helped Mason find Hannibal… We followed Batârd-Montrachet when we should have just followed you."

Will ignored her pointed words. If she could not predict that Will was going to run after Hannibal the first chance he got, then she was deluded. They were blurred together, after all. A horrific package deal.

"Almost as ugly as what Mason wants to do to us is the fact that he can do it with the tacit agreement of people sworn to uphold the law," he threw back.

Any remnant civility was erased from Alana's expression. "I was trying to get to Hannibal before you. I knew you couldn't stop yourself, so I had to try."

Will huffed out a laugh. "By facilitating torture and death?"

"I can abide the thought of Hannibal tortured. Not necessarily to death. I'd say he has it coming, wouldn't you?" Alana paused to study Will, her knowing eyes searching his bloodied face. "Or maybe you wouldn't."

Will looked away from her. He did not want to talk about Hannibal with Alana Bloom, of all people.

"What did you think would happen?" Will wondered.

"I thought Jack Crawford and the FBI would come to the rescue," Alana replied lightly. "But the finer details of what I thought would happen have evolved."

That caught Will's attention. Her words suggested an opening, a tiny space of uncertainty that Will could insert a sliver of suggestion to manipulate the situation to his and Hannibal's advantage.

"Then you have to evolve, Alana," Will pointed out. "You have to spill blood. Either by your own hand, or…"

Will raised his gaze to lock eyes with Alana. “... Someone else’s.”

Chapter End Notes

The second half will be out in 4 days, hopefully!

Digestivo Part 2

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal rose from the floor of the pig pen, removing the irksome collar from his neck as he stretched to full height. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs completely for the first time in hours, feeling like a beast who had been bound in chains for fear of devouring the common folk. Hannibal's eyes glinted with dark satisfaction as he let freedom wash over him like a wave.
>
> The beast had been set free, ready to unleash its wrath.

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the long-ish wait everyone! The holidays, you know?
>
> This chapter is very long because it covers so much. The episode moved really fast, so I really took my time to stretch this chapter out so that it wouldn't feel rushed. Thus, I'm giving Will more time in this chapter to think about everything, and this is most evident when he wakes up in Wolf Trap - Hannibal does not immediately come inside and they don't immediately strike up a conversation. There's about a 5 minute gap for Will to collect his thoughts.
>
> Anyways, I hope you enjoy feral Hannibal in the beginning to offset sad Hannibal at the end <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal knelt naked in the rough hay with his arms spread out and tethered above him in the pig stall, and focused on his breathing. His body was aching from being forced to sustain such a position for an extended period of time, and the fresh brand on his back was itching and pulling tight at the skin.

Hannibal was no stranger to pain, and was able to regulate his experience of it with enough focus. He had trained his mind to receive the messages of pain with grace, which was why he only inhaled slowly when Cordell pressed the white-hot iron of the Verger seal to his back.

Hannibal was handling the discomfort of being trussed up like a show pig equally well. It was difficult to respire regularly in his current position, but he was compensating by taking shallow breaths more frequently. He only wished he had been allowed to keep the suit. Not for fear of catching a chill for being so exposed in the cold winter air, but rather because it was quite nice attire.

Mason had gotten his personal style and measurements spot on. Hannibal was impressed.

He passed his time with the pigs observing the lone guard stationed near the exit. Hannibal was prevented from lifting his head too far by the collar around his neck, but he could just make out the guard reclining comfortably in a metal chair, a tranquilizer gun plainly resting on the table next to him. Hannibal was also aware of a real gun holstered at his side, and a knife that gleamed when the guard periodically removed it from his pocket to twirl.

Hannibal's eyes were drawn to the glint of the blade, and he wondered how long it would take to coax the man into cutting through his restraints.

He was saved from testing out any theories by the appearance of Margot Verger, her Louboutin heels clacking elegantly against the brick floor.

"*Buonasera, Signor*," she bade the guard without a glance in his direction.

"*Buonasera, Signora* Verger."

Margot slowed her approach as she got closer to Hannibal, her hesitance amusing him greatly.

"Thank you for coming, Margot," Hannibal greeted her shoes. "Hasn't been that long since I treated you. Have you started taking the chocolate, as Mason likes to say, after you fought him for so long?"

“Are we in therapy now?” Margot replied dryly.

“You tell me,” Hannibal exhaled. Talking was proving to be more taxing than breathing in this position.

Suddenly Margot got down on her knees in front of Hannibal’s pen, allowing Hannibal a clear glimpse of her vulnerable expression.

“Mason promised to give something back to me,” she shared quietly. “Something that he stole.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow in interest.

“There was a surrogate all along,” she whispered. “It’s a Verger baby. It’s *my baby*.”

He studied her wet eyes and wobbly mouth. “Mason will deny you. He will always deny you. You know you’ll have to kill him.”

Margot gave a small, watery smile.

“You saying you’d do it for me?” Hannibal remained silent and she sighed. “I could never trust you.”

“No, of course not,” Hannibal breathed heavily. “But you could trust me never to deny that I did it.” He heaved another breath. “It would actually be more therapeutic for you to kill him yourself. You’ll remember I recommended that in session.”

Margot smiled softly again. “Wait until I could get away with it, you said.”

“What difference would one more murder charge make to me?” Hannibal panted. “I’m the only other suspect you’ve got. You can do it when it suits you, and I’ll write a letter gloating about how much I enjoyed killing him myself.”

They stared at each other, before Hannibal’s attention was drawn away by the arrival of Alana Bloom. Her gait was different than he remembered, likely due to her injuries from being thrown out Hannibal’s second-story window, but her scent was the same.

“*Buonasera*,” she murmured to the guard.

Before he had the chance to respond, Alana seized the tranquilizer gun from the table and shot the man in the throat, immediately knocking him out cold.

He fell to the ground with a thud, and Hannibal licked his lips.

“He has a pocketknife,” he called.

Alana bent down with some difficulty and retrieved said knife, gripping onto it tight as she hobbled over to join Margot.

“I was trying to save Will from you,” she stated through the wooden slates of Hannibal’s pen. “But right now, you’re the only one who can save him.”

Hannibal resisted the urge to rebuke her. Will didn’t need to be saved from him, he needed to be saved from his delusions of reality that restricted his true nature and the expectation of others that fed his instability.

“Promise me you’ll save him,” Alana demanded. “Please.”

“I promise,” Hannibal responded easily. “And I *always* keep my promises, Alana.”

He stared at her unblinkingly as she swallowed down her fear.

“Just cut the ropes on one arm, give me the knife, and leave,” Hannibal instructed. “I can do the rest.”

Slowly, Alana opened the gate to Hannibal’s pen and crouched down to be at eye level, just a breath away. Her gaze was hard and unblinking. The sliver of fear that Hannibal had seen in her moments ago had morphed into something akin to determination.

Alana really should thank him, one of these days. He’d made her into someone a lot stronger than who she used to be.

“Are you going to kill Mason?” Alana deadpanned.

Hannibal’s lips curved upwards. “Margot is. Snatch some of my hair, back from the hairline, if you don’t mind. Get some skin. Put it in Mason’s hand after he’s dead.”

They stared at each other for a moment, Alana remaining as still as death.

“Could I have ever understood you?” she whispered.

Hannibal considered laughing, but he respected Alana enough to give her a direct answer.

“No.”

Will was the only one who could understand, and Hannibal was going to save him.

Alana yanked a handful of hair from Hannibal's head, sawed through the ropes binding his right hand, and dropped the pocketknife in the hay. The two women left as Hannibal gnawed through the coarse rope on his wrist, only picking up the knife once his right hand was entirely free. He easily cut through the ropes securing his left arm, then sliced through the last two tethers connected to his collar.

Hannibal rose from the floor of the pig pen, removing the irksome collar from his neck as he stretched to full height. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs completely for the first time in hours, feeling like a beast who had been bound in chains for fear of devouring the common folk. Hannibal's eyes glinted with dark satisfaction as he let freedom wash over him like a wave.

The beast had been set free, ready to unleash its wrath.

He stepped out of the pen and walked over to the unconscious guard. Tranquilizers generally last for about an hour, and by the time this guard woke up Hannibal imagined that he'd be long gone, a trail of blood in his wake.

He dressed himself in the man's clothes, taking his time to make sure each article allowed for maximum functionality. The sweater was a bit tight but stretchy enough for Hannibal to move around in, whereas the pants were perfect, designed for flexibility in combat. The boots were on the small side, but a few paces around the room acclimated Hannibal to their fit. Before long, Hannibal fully adjusted to the clothes so that they fit like a second skin and he was ready for what lay ahead.

He gripped the knife in his hand and stepped over both guns, uninterested in such boring weapons, but there was an old hammer resting behind one of the pig pens that he retrieved. Hannibal much preferred the intimacy that blades and other close-contact instruments yielded, and took pride in the certain skill set and level of force required to wield them. Anyone could kill with a gun, making such tools inelegant and irrelevant to Hannibal.

He stalked down a hallway and made his way toward the exit using the mental map he created by paying attention during his restrained travels earlier. There were no guards in the first hallway, but when he spied into the second hallway he saw three armed men lining the long walls. Hannibal's eyes focused on the nearest one and attacked, a knife in one hand and a hammer in the other.

He sprang at the first guy and slit his throat quickly, killing him before he even had time to move. The movement alerted the remaining two guards who turned and went for their guns, but Hannibal did not slow after slicing the first man's throat and immediately went straight for the next guard.

The guy's eyes widened as he realized he was too slow on his draw and Hannibal slammed the hammer into his chest, breaking his ribs and puncturing his heart. Blood spurted out of his mouth and he went limp as Hannibal pulled the hammer from his chest with a wet squelch.

The third guard — who Hannibal recognized, with a sharp smile, as the man who held a gun to Will's head — finally retrieved his gun and fired, the bullets going straight into the wall as Hannibal ducked out of the way and rolled towards him.

He smashed the hammer into the guard's foot with a bone-splintering crack. The man screamed and Hannibal left the hammer embedded in the foot so he could reach up and catch the wrist that held the gun. Now on his knees in front of the screaming shooter, Hannibal slashed the knife through his soft abdomen like he was cutting through butter.

Blood sprayed onto Hannibal's face and he stood up as the guard swayed, the light fading from his eyes. He was dead, he just didn't know it yet.

Hannibal retrieved the hammer as the doors at the end of the hallway banged open, two more guards charging in with guns drawn.

In the split second before triggers were pulled, Hannibal hurled the hammer through the air in a bloody arc. It spun quick as lightning and smacked into the skull of the man on the right, the momentum sending him to the ground with a heavy thud.

Hannibal used one hand to hoist the now-dead disemboweled man in front of him, shielding the rain of bullets from the remaining guard and driving straight towards him. The guard had nowhere to retreat to in the small hallway and shouted as Hannibal slammed the dead body into him, forcefully knocking him against the wall. Hannibal used the next second to throw his meat shield away, raise the knife, and slash the guard's throat.

Hannibal turned to the man on the floor, pulling the hammer out of his head while cutting his throat at the same time. Just to be sure.

The hallway smelled of blood and gunsmoke as Hannibal left it, confident that he had dispatched all of Mason's guards in the immediate vicinity. He dropped the knife and carried on with just the hammer, preferring the feel of the hardened wood as blood soaked into it.

His chest heaved as he finally reached the exit, stepping outside to see the moon hanging above the snowy field backing up to the Verger estate. The stars were out, and Hannibal felt more liberated than he had in years.

He could leave now, run through the trees and never look back. He wouldn't be caught. He could leave Will and simply be free.

The thought crossed Hannibal's mind.

But he made his choice long ago.

Hannibal took a deep breath of cold, night air and turned back into the mansion, for the first time determined to save someone other than himself.

Will stared at the ceiling above him, hating that he couldn't move from how tight his body was strapped into the surgical chair, including his head which was locked into place by a scary-looking vice. To top it all off, a chill was starting to settle into his bones as a result of being shirtless.

Will thought he had been pretty level-headed up until now. Even biting Cordell's cheek was justified, as a method of self-defense.

But all that went away the moment he couldn't move an inch. He no longer had the ability to lash out with his teeth like he had a few hours before.

Will was officially starting to panic.

He knew Mason designed it this way, for Will to be uncomfortable and freak out while waiting for his face to be inevitably peeled away. But not even the spite he felt for the ugly sadist could remedy his growing panic, and Will hated himself for it.

He thought he was strong, or at least strong enough to handle Mason Verger. If he could deal with Hannibal Lecter, he could deal with anything.

Or maybe not.

Will hadn't been scared of the horrors in his life for so long now, he almost forgot what fear felt like. He did not appreciate the reminder.

He was glad to hear Mason being wheeled into the makeshift operating room, as it gave him something to focus on other than the overwhelming feeling of helplessness.

"Cordell told me if I waited long enough, he could grow me a new face from my own cells," Mason greeted casually. "But I was adamant it was *your* face I wanted."

Will did not speak, his pointed silence his last tool of resistance.

"I was looking at your face while you were watching me cut mine off," Mason continued, "and I thought, 'Oh, that's a nice face.'"

Will remembered that night; how metallic Mason's blood had smelled, how grotesque he had looked under the moonlight, and how elegantly *powerful* Hannibal had been.

"You're going under now, Mr. Verger," Cordell chimed in. "When you wake up, your face will be bound and uncomfortable."

Will couldn't see what was going on beside him, but he imagined that Mason was looking frightfully excited. Indeed, his dark brand of enthusiasm carried into his words when he next spoke.

"Have you accepted Jesus, Mr. Graham? Do you have faith?"

Will's answer to that was such a resounding *no* that it would have been comical if he was not still shivering from fear and the cold.

"I do," Mason said happily. "I'm free! Hallelujah."

With that, Mason went silent and Will heard his breathing start to even out, indicating that he had succumbed to unconsciousness. He could also hear Cordell's heavy steps growing closer, and his heart raced with horrified anticipation.

Cordell entered Will's line of sight and picked up a large needle connected to the waiting IV. Will hissed as the needle pushed into the tender skin on his inner arm, and tried to clench his fists to distract from the intrusion but found that his muscles would not obey his commands.

"This will immobilize your body, but you'll feel everything." Cordell hovered over Will and gave an eerie smile. "I'm going to cut off your face without anesthesia, Mr. Graham."

Renewed panic coursed through his body along with the drug, and Will closed his eyes tightly. It was the only thing he could do to try and escape the present situation, although he knew with dread that there would be no real escape.

Will hadn’t entered his mind palace in a while, but he desperately hoped he could do it now. Between the options of dissociation or enduring unimaginable pain as his face was cut off, Will grabbed onto dissociation.

Images flashed through his mind as he tried to run towards a safe haven. There was the stream where Abigail was, but Will couldn’t handle that right now. Castle Lecter was a possibility, but Will would rather not dwell on Hannibal’s trauma when he was trying to distract from his own.

As he felt Cordell mark his face with a felt-tip pen, Will’s breathing picked up and he ran faster through the possibilities in his mind. There was Hannibal’s office, Hannibal’s kitchen, the FBI forensic lab, the Uffizi Gallery — but none of those were comforting enough for Will, and his panic was growing. He wondered if it was possible to have a panic attack while your body was frozen, and feared he would soon find out.

Somehow in Will’s frenzied state of mind, the image of his house in Wolf Trap surfaced. He fixated on that memory and clung to it, clearly picturing the warm light spilling out of the windows into the night’s darkness. From Will’s position across the field, the house resembled a boat on the sea, floating in calm waters. He once told Hannibal, before everything happened, that it was one of the only times he truly felt safe.

The memory gave him the same feeling of safety now, and succeeded in stopping the impending panic attack. Will took a deep breath, pictured the soothing house that looked like a boat, and tried to forget where he was.

“You’ll be sure to let me know if this hurts, won't you?”

When the cold blade of a scalpel cut into the side of his face, Will’s ears rang and he pictured himself sprinting across the field towards that safe boat on the sea, trying to reach his dogs who never failed to comfort him.

Suddenly, the scalpel stopped cutting through Will’s face and fell to the floor with a clatter. Will’s eyes flew open, instinctively hopeful, and watched as blood trickled out of Cordell’s mouth. His eyes were glassy but he was obviously still alive as he moaned weakly, a status

that was abruptly changed when a hammer swung from behind him to forcefully nail him in the temple, the crack of his skull music to Will's ears.

Cordell crashed onto the floor to reveal Hannibal looming in the space behind him, soaked with blood and gripping a hammer.

"Apologies for letting him touch you," Hannibal panted. "I have been rather busy."

Will could do nothing except make blazing eye contact with Hannibal as relief flooded his paralyzed body. He hated how happy he was to see him.

Hannibal studied Will for a moment and seemed to figure out his affliction with a quick glance around the surgical supplies. "Ah, a mild paralytic?"

Will blinked in confirmation.

"I see," Hannibal nodded, his breathing now evened out. "I would relieve you of its influence, dear Will, but I'm afraid I can't have you interfere with what I'm about to do."

You asshole! Will screamed internally. *Take this fucking needle out of my arm right now!*

"I will remove the drug when the time is right," Hannibal reassured, dropping the hammer and wiping his bloody hands on a blue towel before snapping on a pair of surgical gloves. "Until then, relax. I will get us out of here safely."

Shut up! Will wanted to yell. *We won't be safe if you waste too much time on whatever fucking dramatic thing you have planned!*

Will seethed silently as Hannibal quickly closed the fresh cut on his face with expert stitches and turned to Cordell's corpse. He knelt down on the floor out of Will's line of sight, and a few moments later Will started hearing a series of wet, squishing sounds.

Will couldn't see what Hannibal was doing but it didn't sound good. He blinked hard in frustration, cursing Hannibal for his ill-timed violence. They didn't have time to mutilate Cordell in whatever artistic way Hannibal had envisioned; they needed to get the hell out of this god-forsaken farm before Mason's hired guns or the FBI reached them and they were trapped.

Hurry up! Will shouted in his mind. *Hannibal, there's no* time.

Eventually, the gross noises stopped and Hannibal straightened up over Cordell's body holding something big and fleshy in his hands. Will watched as he walked over to where Mason lay, still unconscious, and once again out of Will's field of vision. There were new noises that sounded like fabric being threaded through metal, but Will couldn't be sure.

Finally! Will yelled inwardly. *Now can we get the fuck out of here?!*

"Hannibal," a slightly distressed voice called.

Why is Alana here? Will groaned to himself.

Hannibal reentered Will's vision, shucking off gloves dripping with blood and placing a clean hand on Will's leg protectively.

"Alana," he acknowledged. "I did not think I would see you again tonight. Either of you."

Again? Will noticed, mind whirring. Did his little try at manipulation work out? Did Alana really release Hannibal?

He found himself feeling pleased at the likely possibility.

“My baby’s dead,” came Margot’s empty voice. “I want what Mason promised me.”

Will could see Hannibal’s eyes flicking around the room.

“Is that why you brought the cattle prod?” Hannibal asked lightly. “If you are so determined to do this, why do you need my help?”

Alana stepped forward then, walking up to Hannibal so that Will could see her cane in one hand and a cattle prod in the other. He still couldn’t see Margot, but from the way she sounded Will imagined that she was crying.

“I am not adept at finding men’s prostates,” Alana said dryly. “I figured you were.”

Will watched Hannibal’s lips curve up into a smile. “Indeed. But why would I help you?”

“Because we’ll stay out of your way and won’t call the police immediately after you leave,” Margot replied, voice shaking. “And because I’ll shoot you if you don’t.”

There was the sound of a gun cocking.

Hannibal tilted his head. “Not particularly convincing arguments.” He thought for a moment, then nodded. “Nevertheless, I will help you, Margot, because you asked me to.”

With that, Hannibal put on a clean set of surgical gloves and strode back over to Mason. Will wanted to scream again; he was so annoyed that Alana and Margot were apparently using Hannibal to harvest Mason’s sperm, delaying their escape from this place. He was even more annoyed at Hannibal for going along with it and leaving Will paralyzed on the table, half-naked, without a second thought.

Will closed his eyes again, but he could not shut out the noises that were emanating from right next to him, making it all too easy to imagine what Hannibal was doing. Will wanted to

gag.

“The cattle prod, please,” Hannibal requested after some time.

Alana held it out to him wordlessly, averting her eyes. She was the only person in Will’s line of vision so he stared at her, but she did not look at him once.

Will heard the muted zapping of the cattle prod and felt nauseous. He couldn’t say that Mason didn’t deserve what was happening to him, but the procedure itself was incredibly unsettling, even in Will’s imagination. Apparently Hannibal made quick work of it, because before long he was back in Will’s vision handing off a suspicious vial to Alana.

Will stubbornly did not think about Hannibal’s noticeable expertise in milking prostates.

It was only after Alana clutched onto the vial that she glanced at Will. Hannibal intercepted her gaze and resumed his position in front of Will, a bare hand carefully removing the needle from his arm.

“I keep my promises, Alana,” Hannibal said lightly. “Now it is time for you to keep yours.”

Alana didn’t need to be told twice, swiveling on her cane back towards Margot. Once they had left, Hannibal turned to Will.

“I will return soon,” he vowed.

Will watched him slip away, feeling like ants were crawling under his skin. Although the panic from anticipating the loss of his face had subsided, Will’s body was buzzing from the consequential adrenaline that was only amplified by the new fear that Hannibal would not return.

He wanted to scream, to fight, to run — but all he could do was wait, frozen, for Hannibal to return. If he ever did.

It was exactly Hannibal's brand of humor, to leave Will paralyzed like this. When Will was last immobile, he couldn't escape *from* Hannibal. Now, if Hannibal left him, Will wouldn't be able to escape *with* him.

His mounting anxiety was tempered by Hannibal's sudden reappearance at his side. Will took a deep breath in relief — Hannibal wasn't going to leave him this time — and noticed him holding a bloody sweater.

"My apologies, but this was the warmest clothing I could find short of raiding Mason's closet," Hannibal told him as he dismantled the restraints and tugged the shirt over Will's head.

He was right. The sweater was warm, the fresh blood heating Will's skin and stopping his shivers.

Without warning, Hannibal hoisted him up and carried him out the door. On the way, Will caught a glimpse of Mason with a mask over his face, and Cordell on the floor without a face.

Will closed his eyes and half-heartedly tried to fight the feeling of deep satisfaction seeping into his bones.

Hannibal's steps were slow, but steady. He was panting again, understandable from the strain of carrying Will, but he did not falter. Not once, not even injured and exhausted, not even when they left the house and started cutting across the snowy field.

He's incredible, Will thought. He could feel Hannibal's muscles bulging from being so closely pressed against him, and swallowed. *He really is a predator, a beast.*

Suddenly, there were two soft pops and the sound of bodies dropping in the snow. Will could see nothing from his position except Hannibal's face, and he watched it as Hannibal glanced behind them, then faced forwards again, nodding.

Will could not see, but he did not need to see to know that Chiyoh had protected Hannibal once again.

She better have a car waiting, Will thought.

Chiyoh did have a car waiting. It only took a few more yards before Will felt Hannibal step out of the snow and onto hard ground, likely a road. A few seconds later, Will was being moved out of Hannibal's arms and into the backseat of what appeared to be a four-door sedan. From the tough quality of the leather under Will's cheek, he knew it was an expensive car. Expensive, and warm.

Will took a certain amount of pleasure in knowing that he and Hannibal were absolutely sullying Chiyoh's fancy rental car with blood.

To Will's surprise and annoyance, Hannibal did not sit with him in the backseat and instead slid into the passenger's seat up front.

"Where to?" Chiyoh asked blandly, putting the car into drive.

Hannibal took a moment to catch his breath. "Wolf Trap, Virginia."

Will exhaled loudly through his nose, but Hannibal ignored him.

He wasn't sure what he thought about Hannibal taking him home. He wasn't sure how he felt about Hannibal rescuing him. He just knew that he hated being so useless and passive, leaving Hannibal in charge of his fate. He also knew that it hurt him, right in his chest, to feel Hannibal carry him like something precious and head towards his home like it was the most natural place for him to go.

The intimacy of it all burned Will's throat like bad whiskey.

The warmth of the car invaded Will's paralyzed body and soothed his tense muscles. He felt the noise in his mind get quieter, and his eyelids drooped with fatigue.

Hannibal must have noticed, like he always did, and spoke softly. "Go to sleep, Will."

Will wasn't strong enough to resist, and drifted off in a light slumber as Muskrat Farm faded into a bad dream.

The slamming of a car door roused Will from sleep, but only just. He was still disoriented and drowsy when Hannibal pulled him from the backseat of the car and carried him into the house.

His house.

Will licked his dry lips and groaned as he realized that he could move his face, but no other part of his body. "Mild" paralytic, his ass.

"Hannibal," he whispered, just loud enough for the man to hear and look down at him in his arms.

"Can you move?" Hannibal inquired clinically.

Will tried to shake his head and was frustrated when he couldn't. "No. Just talk."

Hannibal carried him straight into the bathroom, setting him down next to the tub. "I imagine that's quite irritating. As you cannot do so yourself, will you allow me to bathe you?"

“No,” Will scoffed. Hannibal looked much too pleased about the present situation for Will to allow him to do something so intimate. But… the dried blood from the sweater had crusted onto his skin and was beginning to itch.

The knowledge that Hannibal likely designed it that way with his choice of sweater was not enough for Will to hold onto spite and withstand such uncomfortable conditions.

“You can wash the blood off with a washcloth,” Will allowed, not bothering to hide his annoyance.

Hannibal nodded once and got to work peeling off the sweater. Will ignored him as best as he could, but that was hard to do with Hannibal in his personal space. It was even harder when he wet a washcloth and started wiping gentle circles on Will’s chest.

Will flashed back to a couple days ago, when Hannibal had cleaned his bullet wound from Chiyoh. He vividly remembered the way Hannibal had embraced him to take off his suit jacket, holding him for much longer than necessary. Will was not in blinding pain now like he was then, and he was very aware of how Hannibal was taking his time to wash away the dried blood flaking his skin. He was also aware of his own chest rising and falling as his breathing picked up without his permission.

“This is closing up nicely,” Hannibal murmured as he tenderly ran the washcloth over Will’s bullet wound. “There is no sign of infection.”

Will stubbornly remained silent, clenching his eyes shut. Hannibal’s words and actions conveyed a degree of gentleness that was painful. He recalled their conversation on the plane, when he let it slip that he craved tenderness between them, but not when it was painful. It was painful now, when Will was paralyzed and powerless to do anything but take the touches Hannibal bestowed upon him.

The intimacy between them was threatening to tear Will apart.

He opened his eyes to find Hannibal gazing back at him, less than a foot away. The washcloth had turned cold, but it didn't matter as it seemed that Hannibal had finished cleaning him. He had not cleaned himself and blood was still splattered across his face, somehow making him even more handsome than he already was. The gore complimented him in a breathtaking way, or rather it burned off the person-suit that he often wore.

With Hannibal's face covered and hair matted with blood, Will saw him for all he was.

I let you know me. See me.

"I see you," Will whispered, eyes once again fluttering in exhaustion.

He hated how much he loved what he saw.

Hannibal's eyes were burning into him, and as Will's heart rate slowed down he reached out to hold his limp hand.

"Seeing goes both ways. I see you, Will." Hannibal squeezed his hand. "Sleep. I will be here when you wake."

Will let his eyes fall shut, the promise sounding much more comforting that Will knew it should.

The next time Will woke, he felt the sun on his face and almost sighed with relief when he discovered he could move his body.

He was in his bed, at home. Hannibal must have dressed him in clean clothes, then put him to bed. Will sat up in bed, glancing around to see that Hannibal was outside, talking to Chiyoh.

He kept his promise. He didn't leave.

Will stretched out his limbs, glad to be back in control of his own body, and thought about what could happen next.

He hadn't planned for any of this to happen. When he left for Italy, he intended to find Hannibal and follow his instincts, whatever they happened to be. He did that, and ended up thrown off a train, shot, and almost eaten. Then, he got kidnapped by Mason Verger and almost had his face cut off before being killed.

Will had no idea what was going to happen next, and he was both scared and angry about the loss of control.

He was scared for natural reasons. Not having any control or power, especially when it came to his relationship with Hannibal, was terrifying. It reminded Will of the months after he first met Hannibal, when he was being played with like a toy. The prospect of anything remotely similar happening again was not an option. The next time Hannibal tried to drug him or manipulate him, Will could only hope that he had enough control left to stop him. He was afraid that he wouldn't.

Perhaps more than that, Will was angry. He was angry that he always, *somehow*, wasn't in full control. Whether it be of himself or of the situation, it didn't matter. Will was pissed that Hannibal always managed to hold more control, and that he *still* had more control. He was walking around free, talking to Chiyoh, like everything was fine. Like he was untouchable.

While Will sat in bed, a slave to his maelstrom of emotions and always reacting, never acting.

It all made Will seethe in anger, but it also made him incredibly and indescribably *tired.*

He was physically exhausted from everything that had happened in the last few days. He had been mentally and emotionally exhausted for months, and seeing Hannibal in the flesh only

made that worse. Hannibal occupied all of his thoughts because Will was constantly fighting himself over his feelings and second-guessing his decisions about Hannibal. Will wasn't in agreement with himself about Hannibal, and he knew, at this rate, he never would be.

That level of fixation was exhausting.

Something had to change. Will *needed* a change, he needed to do something, he needed to be in control again and make himself forget about Hannibal Lecter.

If he didn't, he would destroy himself before Hannibal ever had the chance.

I'm curious whether either of us can survive separation.

Will needed to know if it was possible because he knew that the way things were going, he couldn't survive being so conjoined.

Will leaned back against the soft pillows, and examined his options.

He couldn't kill Hannibal. He'd had multiple opportunities to kill him, and each time discovered that he couldn't do it. Besides, dying was the easy way out. There was no suffering there, and Will wanted Hannibal to suffer like he had suffered.

Although Will's heart yearned for it, he sure as hell couldn't run away with Hannibal. The option only crossed his mind because his heart demanded to have an audience, but Will pushed it away with relative ease and minimal pain. He was too angry with Hannibal to join him.

Will could push Hannibal away, banish him to some unknown place. The idea was appealing, but deep down Will knew that it wouldn't change anything. It would be like their eight months of separation all over again, of Will not being able to stop thinking about Hannibal and revolving his entire life around finding him again. He refused to repeat history.

The only other option, in Will's mind, was prison.

His experience at the BSHCI was horrible. He felt isolated, alone, and crazy from having nothing but free time to think about the monsters inside and outside his head. If Hannibal went to prison, Will was sure he'd be going out of his mind with boredom and disgust for the terrible living conditions.

It was the perfect punishment for him, and the perfect way for Will to take back control.

It wouldn't be easy to do. Hannibal wouldn't just turn himself in on Will's insistence; in fact, he'd most likely do the opposite of whatever Will suggested. Even if Will went that route, and told Hannibal to escape from the law, he wouldn't respond by immediately turning himself in.

He would have to reject Hannibal.

Only then, rejected and tossed aside, would Hannibal surrender. There was no other option; Hannibal would simply keep running if he thought Will was still interested in him, whether that be in joining him or killing him. Will would have to convince him that he wanted nothing to do with him anymore.

Will had always found Hannibal difficult to read. It was ironic, that the man who understood him the best was the only one that Will could not immediately see with his empathy. Perhaps the problem was that they were too similar, and Will did not see Hannibal right away because he did not even want to see himself.

That was still true, but Will thought he could see Hannibal a lot better now. Hannibal could see him too, and if Will was going to try and manipulate Hannibal into turning himself in, then he needed to be completely honest. Luckily for Will, he had so many conflicting feelings about Hannibal that it shouldn't be too hard.

However, if one part of him was telling the truth, that meant another part of him was lying.

Hannibal opened the door and came inside then, clean and bundled up in some of Will's spare clothes. He walked over to the bed and retrieved a notebook Will hadn't noticed before, its pages full of some sort of complex mathematical equations.

Will's focus was drawn off the intriguing notebook and back onto Hannibal as he took a seat in a chair pulled right up to Will's bed, positioned like Hannibal had been watching over him as he slept. The mental image was painfully intimate, like most things between them, and Will sighed.

"Do we talk about teacups and time and the rules of disorder?" Hannibal wondered, breaking the silence first.

Will closed off his face but kept eye contact. "The teacup is broken. It's never going to gather itself back together again."

Hannibal paused. "Not even in your mind?"

Will didn't answer. He was too surprised to hear Hannibal be so vulnerable and so open with what he wanted. Although, the angry beast hiding under Will's skin was purring at Hannibal's begging.

Hannibal stared at him, and continued speaking when it became clear that Will would not respond. "Your memory palace is building. It's full of new things. It shares some rooms with my own." Hannibal's eyes burned into Will's. "I've discovered you there, victorious."

Will shook his head minutely. "When it comes to you and me… there can be no decisive victory."

Hannibal considered that. "We are a zero-sum game?"

Will sighed, breaking eye contact for a moment to look around his house. It had been sitting here, collecting dust, while Will was in Europe chasing Hannibal. He had even instructed Alana to put his dogs in a kennel while he was away. Will reminded himself that what he was about to do was to punish Hannibal and to take back control, so that he'd never uproot his life for Hannibal like that again.

"I miss my dogs," Will confessed. "But I'm not going to miss you."

He turned his head back to lock cold eyes onto Hannibal.

"I'm not going to find you. I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are, or what you do," Will said evenly.

He was lying, but he was being truthful at the same time. For Will, truth and lies had started to blur together just like him and Hannibal had. He took a deep breath to steady himself for the painful truth-lie that he was about to utter next.

"I don't want to think about you anymore," Will whispered.

Hannibal looked away and swallowed. His pain was palpable, but he was not alone in it. Will just had to make sure Hannibal was too blinded by his own pain to see Will's.

"You delight in wickedness then berate yourself for the delight," Hannibal finally chose to say.

"You delight," Will murmured firmly. "I tolerate."

Hannibal looked away again, blinking.

"I don't have your appetite," Will whispered, then choked out the final nail in the coffin. "Goodbye, Hannibal."

Hannibal glanced at Will briefly, then looked down for a long moment before heavily rising from the chair. He slowly walked towards the door, pausing right in front of it like he hoped Will would take it all back. When Will remained stubbornly silent, Hannibal opened the door and walked away.

Hannibal's ears were ringing as he walked out the door, onto Will's porch, down the steps, and kept walking around the side of the house. He walked until tears obscured his vision and he stopped to lean against the side of Will's house, for fear that he would stumble.

His heart had barely mended, and Will had broken it again. He had ripped the tender organ right out of Hannibal's chest and eaten it, each brutal word a hungry bite.

Will didn't want to think about him anymore.

He made other gut-wrenching proclamations, but that one summed them all up. Will — beautiful, radiant Will — did not want to think about Hannibal any longer. His wording was important; he did not say he *didn't* think about Hannibal anymore (because it was obvious he did, with how conjoined they were), he said he *did not want to*.

Will was making a conscious decision to carve out all remnants of Hannibal, and with it had carved out Hannibal's heart from his chest.

This was different from betrayal, or simple indifference. Hannibal could accept it if Will simply lost interest in their connection, and no longer felt anything for him. It would hurt, but it would be a natural ending. Hannibal couldn't imagine that his own feelings would decline so easily, but he could accept that Will's would.

However, that wasn't the case. Will wasn't indifferent to Hannibal, he was pushing him away because, in spite of everything he felt for Hannibal and their bond, he didn't want it.

I gave you a rare gift, but you didn't want it.

Will's answer, back then, was to disagree. Even after Hannibal gutted him, Will avowed that he did want that rare gift of Hannibal's true self, and the bond tethering them together.

But now, Will purposefully changed his mind. He had the gift, he had all that Hannibal was, but he didn't want it.

I don't want to think about you anymore.

It was different from the last time Will had broken his heart. There was no betrayal here, no attempt to get close to Hannibal and hurt him. The problem was, there was no attempt to get close to Hannibal at all. There was only rejection.

Mindful, forceful rejection of Hannibal, their connection, and all the beautiful parts that made Will who he was. After everything they had been through together, everything they had done to each other, Will decided that he had enough. He dismissed Hannibal with the severity and harshness that one would reject unwanted company.

He supposed that's all he was to Will now. Unwanted company.

Hannibal took a deep breath and collected himself, wiping the stray tears off his face. He was resilient. He could fight this. He could withstand the blood spilling out of his stabbed heart.

He refused to be tossed aside so coldly. He did not accept Will's insistence on forgetting.

Hannibal was going to make it so that Will could never forget where he was, or what he was doing. He was not going to give Will the ignorance he desired. When he was finished, Will would have no choice but to think about him for a very long time.

Killing him didn't even cross Hannibal's mind. He had tried that in Florence, and he would never try to do so again. It would be like killing himself.

It was then that he heard the unique sound of footsteps crunching snow and glanced up to see Chiyoh approaching slowly, still holding her rifle and looking a touch concerned.

"What happened?" she ventured.

Hannibal walked towards her, grounding himself with each step. "Will rejected me."

Chiyoh furrowed her brow.

"I will not intrude and ask for details," she said after some thought, "but if he expressed apathy towards you, he is lying."

I'm not going to miss you.

Hannibal tilted his head. "How did you reach that conclusion?"

Chiyoh looked away. "At home, after he manipulated me into killing my tenant…"

Hannibal's heart stuttered.

"... He made a monument to you out of the body. I do not think he realized that I saw, but I did."

Hannibal wet his lips. "What was it?"

“Transformation,” she replied softly. “A larva growing wings, transforming into a firefly. He placed some of your leftover snails on the body, and when he hoisted it up the glass wings spread out and glinted as fireflies swarmed around it. It was beautiful.”

Hannibal closed his eyes and imagined it. He saw Will constructing the new creature’s wings, gently setting snails on the body to grant them a nice meal, and gazing upon his own creation when he finished. Hannibal wished he could see it in the flesh, but the mental image was enough to make him breathless.

I can feed the caterpillar, and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.

Will must have thought of those words when he made the monument. Hannibal smiled, his broken heart healing just a little bit with the pride he felt for Will’s creation. The knowledge that Will had embraced his darkest instincts while visiting Hannibal’s childhood home was gratifying. He had gone there to learn more about Hannibal, but he had learned about himself in the process.

Hannibal speculated that his firefly was magnificent. He vividly remembered how Will displayed Randall Tier, shaping him into the creature that he truly was inside. It seemed as if the art Will created was more animalistic in nature, and Hannibal was in awe of its beauty.

However, it was not enough to change the magnitude of Will’s proclamation.

Hannibal nodded to himself and locked eyes with Chiyoh again. “Thank you for telling me. Even so, Will has made his choice.”

Chiyoh studied him. “And you have made yours.”

“Yes,” Hannibal affirmed. “The cage awaits.”

It was the natural reaction simply because it was something Will would never expect from him. Hannibal had spent so long evading capture because prison held no interest for him, and also because it brought Hannibal pleasure to hoodwink law enforcement so thoroughly.

Will would not expect that Hannibal would willingly go to prison only when Will had given up on caging him. It would surprise him, infuriate him, and pull him back into Hannibal's orbit so that he would have no choice but to think about him.

"Some beasts shouldn't be caged," Chiyoh sighed, repeating her words from earlier.

Hannibal patted her shoulder. "You do not have to watch over me in the cage, my dear, but do not inhibit my ability to enter it."

With that, Hannibal turned and entered Will's garage, content to nurse his bleeding heart and wait among the boat motors until Jack Crawford came knocking.

Will went outside only when he saw the flashing lights.

He had not followed Hannibal earlier, nor had he called him back and retracted his harsh rejection. Will thought about doing so, had wrestled with the possibility in his mind many times over the hours spent inside his house, staring into space while the sun set and the sky darkened.

In the end, Will had succeeded. He had stopped himself from picking up the pieces of Hannibal that he had just shattered.

Jack hadn't called Will to ask where Hannibal was before showing up at his house with what looked like dozens of FBI agents, all armed to the teeth. It was just shy of 24 hours since he and Hannibal had left Muskrat Farm, meaning that Alana and Margot hadn't yet alerted the authorities of their whereabouts, either.

Jack must have gone to the FBI right after he got back from Florence, then headed straight to Will's house, like he knew that he and Hannibal would escape Mason's clutches and hide out here.

Will had to give Jack some credit. For once, he knew just where to find Hannibal.

"He's gone, Jack," Will called from the porch as Jack and the rest of the FBI agents swarmed his property. Will really hoped Hannibal wasn't gone, and that his manipulation worked.

But at the same time, he hoped that Hannibal *had* left.

Will clenched his fists where he stood, waiting for Jack to respond. He wondered if he could ever escape the constantly opposing emotions he felt for Hannibal and supposed that, one way or another, he was about to find out.

Suddenly, a voice cut through the falling snow.

"Jack! I'm here."

Hannibal walked out of the shadows of Will's driveway with his hands up. Agents in full tactical gear immediately surrounded him but Hannibal went to his knees willingly, without prompting.

Will's heart pounded at the sight, one that he never thought he'd actually see.

"You finally caught the Chesapeake Ripper, Jack," Hannibal mused, of course unable to resist mocking Jack in this moment. Will nearly snorted.

"I didn't catch you," Jack scoffed. "You surrendered."

Hannibal paused, his coolly amused mask morphing into a more serious expression.

“I want you to know exactly where I am,” he murmured. “And where you can always find me.”

He glanced sideways at Will, but he didn’t need to look at him to make it abundantly clear that it was Will he was talking to, not Jack. Will gazed back at him stonily, feeling a piece of himself break off and fall into the snow alongside Hannibal.

It was as if time froze for a second. Will could see the snow framing Hannibal’s face, each little fresh cut illuminated by multiple FBI flashlights. He etched this moment into his memory palace, determined to memorize everything about it because he wanted, *needed*, it to be the last time he saw Hannibal.

He needed to survive on this memory, and this memory alone, in those dark times when he knew he would be tempted to forge a new memory with Hannibal.

Will stared directly into Hannibal’s eyes and filed away the genuine vulnerability, care, and loyalty he saw shining out. Will *saw him,* he saw his heartbreak, his stubbornness, his resolution, and his hope. He saw everything that Hannibal had become, and just how much Will had changed him.

He also saw his own changes reflected in Hannibal’s eyes, framed with pride.

Will thought that he should feel triumphant that his manipulation worked, or at the very least satisfied to have finally taken some control back from Hannibal.

But all he felt was cold.

Will looked away and turned to go back inside, back into the warmth that he knew wouldn't rectify the numbing cold seeping into his bones and settling in his heart.

Chapter End Notes

What did you think??

As y'all know, after this we have a three year time skip before the Red Dragon arc picks up. I AM writing about what happened in those 3 years, including: Hannibal's trial, how Will dealt with that, Hannibal in prison, and how Will ended up married. That fic will be here, and I will finish it before continuing this story for the sake of the timeline. I hope to see y'all over there! <3

The Great Red Dragon

Chapter Summary

> “I didn’t call you, because…” Will thought about it, then shrugged. “I didn’t want to.”
>
> And he didn’t want to. He really, really didn’t want to call Jack, and give in to the part of himself that wanted to rush back into the fray. Back to *Hannibal.*

Chapter Notes

> Wow, I'm so sorry for how long this took me to get out! Thanks to everyone for being so patient with me while I finished my fic about the 3 years of Hannibal & Will's separation. Now we're back to this story! This is the last arc of the show, and it's a great one.
>
> Hope you enjoy this chapter!! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal inhaled the scent of Alana as she entered the foyer of his prison cell. With a casual gesture, the two orderlies beside her entered Hannibal’s cage, one brandishing a nightstick and the other holding a glass of white wine and a plate of truffles.

Hannibal, used to indulging in a glass of wine during Alana’s occasional visits, peacefully moved to the far wall of the cell and gave the second orderly space to deposit the gifts onto his metal table. They left quickly after their task was done, and Hannibal walked back over to take a seat.

Alana sat down in her usual chair with her own glass of wine, unknowingly joining him in the room in his mind palace resembling his former office.

"Bâtard-montrachet and *tartuffi bianchi*,” Hannibal observed.

“How I found you in Florence,” Alana nodded, the red of her lipstick perfectly matching the red of her pantsuit.

“Betrayed by good taste,” Hannibal sighed, then raised his gaze to make eye contact with his jailer. “Is good taste itching at you in your daily rounds of institutional life?”

“An itch easy enough to scratch when there’s cause to celebrate,” Alana responded, raising her wine glass. “Congratulations, Hannibal. You’re officially insane.”

Hannibal allowed himself a single sip of the white wine, savoring the fresh taste of grapes and light alcohol on his tongue. Then, he set the glass to the side, along with the plate of truffles. He has no interest in Alana mocking his good taste.

“There’s no consensus in the psychiatric community what I should be termed,” Hannibal stated.

Alana’s victorious expression was tainted with a hint of displeasure. “You’ve long been regarded by your peers in psychiatry as something entirely other. For convenience, they term you a monster.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “What do you term me?”

“I don’t,” Alana deadpanned. “You defy categorization.”

Hannibal’s eyes followed the movement of her hand lifting the wine glass to her mouth, and the swallow of her throat.

“Do you still prefer beer to wine?” he inquired.

Alana pursed her lips. “I stopped drinking beer when I found out what you were putting in mine.”

Hannibal’s lip quirked. “Who.”

“Who,” Alana agreed with distaste.

Hannibal stayed silent, letting Alana simmer in memories of his beer, and reached for his sketchpad. He often passed the time in his cell by sketching, and presently he had an amusing image in his mind that he’d love to get onto paper.

“This means you’ll be spared the federal death sentence,” Alana said, directing the conversation back to Hannibal. “They had enough to convict you a dozen times over.”

Hannibal smiled to himself, amused that the court could only prove a small amount of the murders he’d done. He didn’t know the exact number he was responsible for, as he’d stopped counting after the first few years, but if he had to guess it would be upwards of a few hundred.

“A baker’s dozen,” Hannibal added lightly, pausing in his sketching to lean forward slightly. “Lest we forget Mason Verger. You’re welcome.”

Alana raised her eyebrows in disbelief. “*You’re* welcome, Hannibal. The needle was guaranteed, but you beat it all on an insanity plea.”

“I’m not insane,” Hannibal said sharply.

Alana exhaled and stood up. “You know that, and I know that. A dozen or a baker’s dozen, enough people have died.”

Hannibal stopped drawing and gazed upon his creation, a version of Botticelli's *Fortitude*, with Alana's face melded into the Virgin's. He looked up at Alana and blinked.

"You haven't," he said lightly.

Alana seemed unimpressed. "A promise in waiting, isn't it? A promise you intend to keep."

Hannibal maintained their eye contact. "I always keep my promises."

Alana swallowed, and after a moment sat back down in her chair. Hannibal resumed sketching, Alana watched him, and neither of them continued the conversation. Hannibal had satisfied his desire to frighten Alana, and she was too stubborn to respond and show that his words had affected her — although they both knew that they had.

Soon enough, Alana drained her glass of wine and stood again. The two orderlies returned and Hannibal retreated to the edge of his cell without prompting, content to watch them take away the barely-touched morsels.

After the click-clack of Alana's expensive heels faded away, Hannibal moved away from the wall and back towards the table. Instead of resuming his sketching, however, he set aside his drawing materials and slid today's paper to the center of the metal surface. He hadn't had the chance to read it yet because of Alana's visit, although the headline had jumped out at him the moment the paper was delivered with his breakfast. It was hard to miss; the gruesome words were painted onto the front page in thick, bold, black lettering.

FAMILY SLAUGHTERED IN BUFFALO

Hannibal smiled at the title. This made two family massacres in the last two months, and the article clearly indicated frustration about the authorities not having any leads.

If any case would beckon Will back into the fray, it would be this one.

Hannibal found it amusing that Alana hadn't touched on the subject of the Tooth Fairy during their session. She must still be haunted by the days that they spent analyzing the crimes of other killers, totally unaware that she was doing so with the most lethal one of all.

He might just have to poke that boundary during their next meeting to see what reaction he would be met with, and how much pain would leak out of the chink he would puncture in her armor.

Hannibal resolved to find out later. For now, he had to prepare for his second visit of the day, from another colleague. He was even somewhat looking forward to it, if only because Frederick brought him endless amusement by simply existing.

As previously agreed upon, Alana sent a few orderlies to his cell to provide him with a portable stove, necessary ingredients, and constant supervision of his activities. They had reached an understanding that Hannibal was allowed to cook, but only very select things on particular days. Blood pudding was relatively easy to prepare and required no tools other than a heat source, so Alana had approved it.

Hannibal wanted to serve the blood pudding to Frederick simply to remind him of the last time they'd partaken in the meal together. He was quite bored in his cage, and took whatever enjoyment he could make for himself as entertainment. Reminding his past colleagues of their unassuming consumption of human flesh — or in this case, blood — was a favorite pastime.

As Hannibal mixed all the ingredients together and set them over the portable stove, he supposed that dear Frederick would be eager to talk about the Tooth Fairy. Unlike Alana, Frederick had no problem getting his buttons pushed, as long as he could push some of Hannibal's in return. Of course, he never succeeded, but it was amusing for Hannibal to let him believe he did.

Still, Hannibal was curious about what Frederick could tell him about the Tooth Fairy. Hannibal could deduce the authorities' frustration and desperation to catch the culprit from the papers, but he wanted to know if Jack had caught the case yet.

Hannibal wanted to know if it was possible for Will to return.

It had been three years. Three whole years without seeing Will, without hearing his voice or breathing his scent. The dull pain of hunger had settled into Hannibal's bones, and he'd had to subsist on wisps of memories of Will living in his mind palace to keep from fully succumbing to starvation.

He'd had news of Will, over the years. He knew Will had moved away from Wolf Trap and settled in Maine. He even knew that he'd taken up with a woman and her young son, remarkably fast. If Hannibal was anything less than polite, he'd say that Will was desperately trying to use his pre-made family to forget about another family he had torn apart and abandoned.

Hannibal knew that eventually, it wouldn't work. Will would come to understand that he'd be living a shadow of a life without Hannibal, and leave his pitiful excuse for a family.

At least, Hannibal hoped he would. He wanted Will to choose him of his own free will, which was why he'd sequestered himself away in prison. He was confident that Will would return, and Hannibal would remind him of the inevitability of his becoming. *Their* becoming.

He was hopeful that time was approaching, with the advent of the Tooth Fairy. He just needed Frederick to confirm his hopes.

And confirm them, he did.

"*Sanguinaccio dolce,"* Dr. Chilton observed as he picked up a plastic spoon. "You've served me this before."

"One of my favorite desserts," Hannibal confirmed, looking over his makeshift plating. "Traditionally made with pig's blood. In this case, a local cow."

Dr. Chilton paused before dipping his spoon into the dessert. "... And when you last made it for me?"

"The blood was from a cow," Hannibal smiled, picking up his own plastic spoon. "Only in the derogatory sense."

Dr. Chilton only sighed and took a bite of the pudding.

"Mm," he savored, then smiled to himself. "Blood and chocolate. That should have been the subtitle of my book."

Hannibal took his first bite of *sanguinaccio dolce* and closed his eyes, relishing the delectable flavors.

"But I promised myself I would never use colons in my titles," Dr. Chilton rattled on. "Colons lose their novelty when overused."

"You'll have to write another book," Hannibal remarked, lips twitching.

"Mm, I am. But not about you," Dr. Chilton said, clearly intending to get a rise out of Hannibal. "Like overused punctuation, the novelty of Hannibal Lecter has waned."

Hannibal kept his eyes on his pudding, letting Frederick believe that he'd succeeded in knocking him down a peg.

"What is the subject of your new book, Frederick?" he asked delicately, like he didn't already know the answer. To get the true answers he wanted from his colleague, he'd have to play-act a little bit.

Dr. Chilton licked his spoon. "The Tooth Fairy."

Hannibal flicked his eyes up with a hint of interest.

“I find folks are a bit more interested in him. He is the debutante,” Dr. Chilton mused, then gestured to the pudding. “Although he lacks your love of presentation.”

“More of a shy boy, this one,” Hannibal pondered.

“I’d love to hear your thoughts,” Dr. Chilton smiled slyly. “What do you think about the Tooth Fairy?”

Hannibal did not blink as he stared at Dr. Chilton. “I think he doesn’t like being called the Tooth Fairy.”

After that, Frederick went on about the Tooth Fairy and how so much more interesting he was than Hannibal, how he was like a breath of fresh air to Hannibal’s old musty attic. Hannibal had to stop himself from laughing at how obviously hard Frederick was trying to offend him. It was only more amusing considering the fact that Hannibal had just submitted a rebuttal to Frederick’s latest article on him that would undoubtedly damage his precious reputation.

Frederick left soon after finishing his pudding, and once Hannibal dutifully placed all cooking materials back in the orderly’s cart, he returned to his metal desk, thinking. Frederick hadn’t given anything away about the Tooth Fairy other than what the newspaper stated, but Hannibal was not deterred.

Frederick was the second opinion that confirmed how terrified the public was of the new killer; certainly terrified enough for Jack Crawford to be under immense pressure to catch the culprit. And when Jack found himself under pressure, he found Will.

Hannibal ran his hands over the thin material of the newspaper, smoothing out the page. It was impossible to fully predict future events, even more so when Will Graham was involved, but Hannibal had hope. Jack would go knocking on Will’s door, and dear Will would have to decide which path to tumble down.

Hannibal wanted to have some influence over that decision.

Elegantly, he removed the front page from the newspaper packet and folded it, making sure to get the headline of the Buffalo murders. He ran his tongue over the edges, softening them before carefully tearing the paper down the fold line, making do without scissors. Once the article was cleanly removed from the newspaper, Hannibal held it up and looked at it.

Will would soon be looking at this very paper.

But it wouldn't be the only thing he'd be looking at. The article would be a taunting eyecatcher, drawing Will's attention and funneling it to the real treasure: a letter.

Hannibal hadn't written Will at all while he'd been incarcerated, but now the Tooth Fairy gave him the perfect opportunity. He craved talking to Will, and now he could do so in the way they had always communicated with each other — under the guise of analyzing other killers.

Hannibal set a creamy piece of stationery on the desk in front of him, picked up a pencil, and began to write.

It was a short note, as he knew Will wouldn't tolerate anything more. In the note, Hannibal truly only communicated one thing — a warning against Will getting involved with the Tooth Fairy.

Hannibal recognized the message as counterproductive to his own desire to reunite with Will, but he felt it was only fair to give Will fair warning of what would happen if he chose to return. Hannibal knew Will Graham better than anyone, so he knew that if Will returned to the FBI to chase killers, leaving his idyllic life behind, it would start a spiral that would result in the inevitability of his becoming.

Will was utterly *starving* without this, and he wouldn't be able to resist partaking in all that returning to Jack, to *Hannibal,* had to offer.

So Hannibal wrote the letter and influenced Will to return to him using the simplest tactic possible: the truth.

Will was not surprised when Jack Crawford showed up at his cabin unannounced. He'd seen the stories of the recent killings, plastered all over the evening news that Molly liked to watch, and onto the front pages of the newspaper he liked to read. Will couldn't have ignored the stories if he tried — and he did try.

He didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to get involved, because he knew that if he did, everything would change.

"You don't want to talk inside?" Jack asked, sitting down on the porch chair when Will handed him a steaming mug.

Will just took a sip of his own hot chocolate.

"Oh, you don't want to let me inside," Jack said, sighing. "I've come too far to let the cold stop me, Will."

"Why should the cold stop what common sense couldn't?" Will grumbled.

Jack studied him. "So you don't want to talk about it here."

"I don't want to talk about it anywhere," Will replied truthfully. "You've got to talk about it, so let's have it, hm? Just, uh…" Will looked away from Jack and into the snowy trees surrounding the cabin. "Just don't get out any pictures, 'cause Molly and Walter will be back soon."

Will really did not want to have this conversation. He was dreading it, but not because he was horrified by the violence of the crimes. He was horrified of himself, for how much he wanted to get involved.

He had worked hard to move on. Move on from Hannibal, from the FBI, from everything. He didn't want to talk to Jack about any of it because he knew, deep down, that he was craving an excuse to abandon what he'd built for the last three years of his life and dive, headfirst, back into the depths.

"How much do you know?" Jack questioned, getting straight to business.

Will sighed in defeat. "Two families, killed in their homes a month apart. Similar circumstances."

"Not similar. The same," Jack said plainly. "You ever think about giving me a call?"

Will frowned. "No."

Jack stared at him. "You know what it is?"

"I didn't call you, because…" Will thought about it, then shrugged. "I didn't want to."

And he didn't want to. He really, really didn't want to call Jack, and give in to the part of himself that wanted to rush back into the fray. Back to *Hannibal.*

"I don't think I can be of any use to you, Jack. I don't think about this anymore," Will spoke with increasing urgency, almost begging Jack to believe him. "I don't believe I could do it now."

Jack nodded, but instead of backing down and leaving like Will hoped he would, he brought out pictures of the families. He talked about what the FBI knew about the killer so far, and

how they thought he was active during the full moon, meaning that they'd have about three weeks until he struck again. Will took in all the unwanted information obediently, not putting up as much resistance as he should.

It was hard to constantly fight what he truly wanted. Especially when Jack didn't take no for an answer.

Molly and Walter came back right around then, and Will begrudgingly introduced everyone. Molly seemed both excited and confused to meet Jack, probably because Will had never talked about anyone specific from his past. He hadn't shared a lot about his past in general with her, and she respected that because she could sense that there was a lot he'd rather forget. There was a lot she'd rather forget too.

The sun was setting, so Molly politely invited Jack inside for dinner. Will knew he should have probably stopped her, but he didn't. Jack seemed to know that he wouldn't.

Jack didn't know Will nearly as well as Hannibal did, but it seemed like he knew enough to know that he just had to chip through Will's initial protestations before convincing him to return. Like it was inevitable, if he just kept at it.

Will supposed that he was right. It *was* inevitable.

He felt his defenses weaken during dinner, after eating the fish that Walter had caught that day. They were all making small talk, and Will realized that he couldn't take it anymore. When Walter went to go walk the dogs, Will went with him. He left Molly alone with Jack, knowing that he would convince her, then encourage her to convince Will. It would be the last little nudge Will needed to take the plunge.

No matter how hard his rationality tried to resist, his dark, true desires crept up into the forefront of his mind and empowered him to silently manipulate the situation from the shadows.

It was something Hannibal would have done. Will didn't know how he felt about that.

Regardless, later that night after Jack had finally left and Will and Molly were about to go to bed, his subtle manipulation paid off.

"How bad is it going to be, if you stay here and read about the next one?" Molly asked softly, embracing him. "If you stay and there's more killing, maybe it would sour this place for you. *High noon*, and all that."

Will sighed. "Do you want me to go?"

Molly hesitated. "I'd have the satisfaction that you did the right thing. He kills *families*."

Will closed his eyes, knowing that he was at the precipice, just waiting to go over the edge.

"If I go…" he whispered. "I'll be different when I get back."

If I get back, Will left unsaid.

Molly smiled. "I won't."

She hugged him again in comfort, but Will didn't feel anything except tired resignation.

Later, in the middle of the night after Molly had fallen into a deep sleep, Will was still awake. He stared at the ceiling and tried to ignore the pull of the letter that had arrived in the mail earlier that day, before Jack's visit. The letter that Will immediately stuffed into the back of his underwear drawer without opening.

He was fighting a losing battle.

Will took a deep breath and carefully got out of bed, making sure not to make a sound for fear of waking Molly. He crept to the dresser and slowly opened the top drawer, reaching inside to pull out that creamy envelope that had lingered at the back of his mind all day.

He pulled out some jeans and a sweater from the dresser as well, already resigning himself to another sleepless night. He wouldn't be able to get back into bed with Molly after reading what Hannibal had to say to him.

Will quietly got dressed and carried the letter into the living room, briefly setting it on a side table while he got the fire started. He may have spent longer than usual poking the fire, but he tried to convince himself that he was making sure it was adequately warm.

When Will could put it off no longer, he sat down in the chair in front of the fire and reached for the letter. He stared at it for a moment, running his thumb over the *Will Graham* printed on the front in beautiful script, and wondered if he was really doing this.

The answer had the magnitude and certainty of an ancient beast, rising up like it had been summoned and settling into his chest, sinking its claws into Will so that he could no longer ignore it. *Yes.*

Will opened the letter.

A newspaper clipping of an article about the most recent killing fell out of the envelope, but Will only briefly glanced at it before returning his gaze to the real treasure. He hadn't seen Hannibal, or his handwriting, for three entire years. Reading it now, his eyes catching on the tenderly curled W's and L's, felt like a drop of water in a terrible drought.

It felt like an appetizer to the main course.

Dear Will, the letter read. Will could almost hear Hannibal's voice, whispering to him.

We have all found a new life, but our old lives hover in the shadows, like incipient madness. Soon enough, I fear Jack Crawford will come knocking. I would encourage you, as a friend, not to step back through the door he holds open.

It is dark on the other side, and madness is waiting.

Hannibal Lecter was signed at the bottom in the same familiar, elegant script that Will somehow didn't think was too superfluous.

Will read the letter once. Twice. Then again, a third time, just to make sure he was reading the thing correctly and not imagining the words on the page.

He felt a little annoyed. It was a very short note, and in essence a warning against returning. It annoyed Will because he knew that Hannibal didn't mean it at all and was just trying to manipulate him into visiting him — but at the same time, he intimately knew that Hannibal was also telling the truth.

He never lied to Will about things like this, and it didn't make sense that he would start now. Besides, Will was used to telling lies and truths at the same time because of how conflicted his feelings were about everything. Hannibal wasn't conflicted, but he was able to hold contrasting opinions and ideas quite easily. It was one of the aspects about Hannibal's personality that Will was jealous of.

This letter was the only correspondence from Hannibal in three years, and it was an infuriating warning whose only intention was to remind Will of what was waiting for him if he returned. As if Will could ever forget, even after trying so hard these past few years.

Will didn't know what he expected when he opened the letter. A poem? A confession?

That was ridiculous. Still, Will couldn't help but feel slightly disappointed. He wanted more.

The problem was, he knew just how to get more. And it looked like he was going to jump at the opportunity, regardless of the very real and damaging potential consequences.

Will sighed and gazed at Hannibal's letter one final time before tossing both it and the cut-out article onto the crackling fire. He couldn't have Molly or Walter finding them laying around the cabin.

He watched the paper curl and burn, the flames melting away the words, but that hardly mattered. Like everything else Hannibal had ever said to him, the words were ingrained in his mind palace.

It is dark on the other side, and madness is waiting.

Somehow, walking through the halls of FBI headquarters was much more disturbing than stepping foot into the crime scene. Will was blissfully alone at the Leeds's home while he looked and walked through the events that had occurred, and it was quiet. Will had the space he needed to process the first horrific crime scene he'd analyzed in three entire years.

But at the FBI, things were not quiet, and Will did not even have his own space to breathe.

Everything felt so different now. Beverly was gone, Hannibal was in prison, and Will had less than a sliver of genuine desire to help Jack catch this new killer.

It wasn't that he was completely uncaring. Will wanted the Tooth Fairy to stop killing, but he had released himself from the responsibility of being the one to catch him. There had been serial killers wreaking havoc for the FBI while Will was firmly ignorant in Maine, and he hadn't helped then. Those killers had always been apprehended, always by someone other than Will.

No matter what Jack said to try to convince himself, Will was sure that he could use someone else to catch the Tooth Fairy. Like Will told Jack at the cabin, he wasn't sure if he could be

helpful. He wasn't sure if he could do it anymore.

Jack had placed all his bets on Will, but Will knew he was the losing pony.

He had to try, though. He had to try to solve it, because if he tried, then that meant he could keep pretending that he came back to actually solve the case — instead of coming back for an entirely unrelated reason.

Will liked to pretend. He'd been doing it all his life. But as rewarding as the benefits were, the costs were completely exhausting.

Will got through the forensic analysis with minimal effort. He didn't make small talk with Price and Zeller, even when they welcomed him back. Before, they were friendly, but had never really been friends. Now, they felt like strangers.

He added in a few notes when prompted, but it was nothing that Jack or another gifted agent wouldn't have already known. Will felt like he was practically reciting what he used to teach at the Academy. He simply wasn't getting the connection, the *knowing*, that he used to. Everything he was extrapolating from the evidence felt glaringly obvious.

The only question he had for Jack was about the family's dog.

Will left Quantico and went straight to the liquor store. He needed some whiskey if he was going to be this close to Hannibal. He had long ago memorized the route from the FBI Academy to the BSHCI. It was over an hour away, but Hannibal was the closest he'd been to Will in three years.

Not close enough, his mind whispered.

Will opened the whiskey as soon as he returned to his little motel room. Looking at the crime scene and imagining himself in all that violence wasn't as terrifying as it used to be. He wasn't even scared of liking it anymore.

He was scared of what he would *do* about it, especially since Hannibal was nearby.

Will took out his phone and dialed Molly, desperate for her voice to give him a distraction from his thoughts. The line rang and rang, but Molly didn't pick up.

Will set the phone down on the bedside table and drained his glass.

With the burn of the whiskey warming his body, Will laid back on the bed, but didn't bother changing into sleep clothes. He knew he wouldn't be sleeping tonight.

Images of the Leeds's house and the crime scene plagued him first, surrounding him like they were suspended in the void of his mind. Will couldn't figure out anything more about it tonight, especially not with two fingers of whiskey in his system, so he pushed them aside.

Images of Hannibal took their place, and Will exhaled, unsurprised.

He was the whole reason Will had come back, after all. Even if Will wanted to pretend like he wasn't.

Will closed his eyes, but the images of Hannibal still lingered.

He saw Hannibal at his old home, in Baltimore. In his kitchen, happily cooking some fancy meal, before it all went bad. Will saw him in Italy, face battered and bruised but eyes undamaged as they gazed softly at Will in front of the *Primavera.*

He saw Hannibal sitting close to his bedside, then a few hours later calmly kneeling in the snow.

That was the last image Will had of Hannibal, but he wanted more. He was so curious how the man was doing in prison, he was absolutely aching to know if Hannibal was suffering or not. He didn't know which outcome he'd prefer. Probably a mix of both.

The images of Hannibal stayed with him through the night, shimmering behind his closed eyes like mirages. Lurking behind them were the crime scene photos of the Leeds's house, close enough that the association between the two was impossible to ignore.

Eventually, Will fell asleep, knowing that he was going to ask to visit Hannibal tomorrow and hating himself for it.

"You were asking about the dog," Jack started, flipping through a few papers at his desk. "Last night, a vet called the police. Leeds and his oldest boy took the dog into the vet the afternoon before they were killed."

Will nodded, filing away that information for later. It was unlikely the timing was a coincidence, but he had another… *lead* to track down right now.

"What's going to happen to it?" he asked.

Jack fixed him with a look. "Please don't worry about the dog."

Will laughed, a low and slightly-hysterical sound. "What else do you expect me to do?"

"The best you can, that's all," Jack replied firmly.

Will looked away, his thoughts from the night before taking the forefront of his mind. He felt pathetic for not being able to resist longer. It was only his second day back, but he could already tell that he couldn't do the job Jack wanted; not without getting what *he* wanted.

“There is something else I could do,” Will said quietly. “I can wait, until I’m driven to it by desperation in the last days before the full moon… or I could do it now, while it might be of some use.”

Jack studied him with sharp, knowing eyes.

“Is there an opinion that you want, Will?”

Will hated that Jack was going to make him say it, but he did not break their eye contact. He wanted Jack to see how serious he was about this, against his better judgement.

“It’s a mindset I need to recover,” Will whispered.

He took a deep breath, then spoke the words that both he and Jack knew were inevitable.

“I have to see Hannibal.”

Jack stayed silent, but after a moment he finally nodded.

Will turned and walked out the door without another word.

He kept moving, his feet carrying him to his car, then his car flying him down the road to the BSHCI. He didn’t have to go immediately, but once Jack granted permission it was like the last fraying rope that had been holding Will back snapped. Suddenly, there was no excuse for him *not* to go.

The hour-plus drive to Baltimore felt like a few seconds, and when Will got out of his car and stood in front of the imposing Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, it felt as if he had been transported to another dimension. It was utterly inconceivable that the high-

class, intelligent, poised man that was *Hannibal Lecter* was currently residing in the place that Will had spent the worst months of his life.

Will had so many emotions rushing through his body that he purposefully kept his mind blank as he slowly walked up the steps and pushed the doors open. He could not control his feelings, but he could control if he listened to them.

Happiness at finally being here, excitement at the prospect of seeing Hannibal, sweet satisfaction from knowing Hannibal was caged, anxiety about their overdue confrontation; it was all swirling inside Will's head, making his body weak and his throat dry.

He did not see any familiar faces as he mindlessly signed in and went through security, nor when he requested to see Hannibal and was met with deep sighs. He thought he would have welcomed the delay if he did see anyone familiar, but he also thought he would've ripped the throat out of anyone who dared to get in his way.

Finally, after what both felt like too long and not nearly long enough, Will stood in front of two large, ornate wooden doors in the newly refurbished basement.

I should have known, he distantly noted. *Hannibal does not change to fit the prison conditions. The prison conditions change to fit Hannibal.*

Will stood in front of those doors for a long time, frozen. What would he find on the other side?

Eventually, he couldn't take not knowing anymore, and broke the final barrier between himself and the monster that had always been close to his heart.

He tried to make his steps rhythmic and steady as he walked into the room. His eyes darted everywhere, taking in the singular cell, the classy furnishings, and finally the figure behind the large glass wall, clad in a white jumpsuit.

He was facing away from Will, as if waiting for the perfect moment to turn and engage in conversation. Standing up straight and confidently, as if he wasn't incarcerated in a prison and rather visiting a pleasant museum.

Standing there calmly, as if he wasn't already perfectly aware of who his visitor was.

As if Will's presence, after three years, didn't affect him at all.

Will closed his eyes once to pull himself together, and when he opened them he made sure that the only expression shining out was cold indifference.

He opened them, and found Hannibal turned around, staring straight at him.

The sight was like a feast after years of famine, but Will did not waver in his determined apathy.

When Will spoke, he did so flat and emotionless, knowing that a projected lack of feeling was the only way to maintain even an illusion of detachment from the man behind the glass.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter."

"Hello, Will."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have their reactions to seeing each other again :)

Kudos and comments much appreciated!!

And the Woman Clothed With the Sun

Chapter Summary

> The first glance caused an explosion of joyful music in Hannibal's mind palace. Will Graham, in the flesh, right in front of him. It was a sight — no, a state of being — that Hannibal had been deprived of for three long years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"That's the same atrocious aftershave you wore in court."

Hannibal's eyes were closed as he inhaled Will's signature scent, as if it was his first breath of fresh air in years. In a way, it was.

The moment he scented Will in the room, Hannibal stopped moving, abandoning the papers he had been sorting on his desk. He paused, allowed himself a truly happy smile, and let Will's presence wash over him.

Then, he turned around.

The first glance caused an explosion of joyful music in Hannibal's mind palace. Will Graham, in the flesh, right in front of him. It was a sight — no, a state of *being* — that Hannibal had been deprived of for three long years.

He drank in the sight of Will like a man dying of thirst, because that was exactly what he was. Hannibal had only been surviving without Will, not thriving like he was used to after meeting him.

Will looked good. He was standing up straight and confident, and his hair was pushed back off his forehead, showing off the thin scar Hannibal had gifted him in Florence.

Hannibal's heart stuttered at the sight. Was Will showing off his scar because he was proud of it, or because he knew Hannibal would want to see it and was trying to manipulate him?

The more Hannibal considered the possibilities, the more he was convinced that it was a little bit of both, and pride warmed his chest. Will truly hadn't changed at all — he was the same beautiful, enchanting, complex man Hannibal had fallen in love with, all those years ago.

Hannibal was silent, content to feast his eyes upon Will.

Then Will opened his mouth, and Hannibal was blessed with a voice he hadn't heard in three long years outside its dull echoes in the corridors of his memory palace.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal smiled.

"Hello, Will," he said softly. "Did you get my note?"

Will did not return his smile. "I got it, thank you."

"Did you read it before you destroyed it?" Hannibal inquired. "Or did you simply toss it into the nearest fire?"

"I read it," Will deadpanned. "And then I burnt it."

"And you came anyway," Hannibal noted.

Will was speaking so flatly, so robotically that Hannibal wanted to sigh. It hurt that Will wasn't allowing his true emotions to leak into their conversation, but not because Hannibal thought he was entitled to them. Rather, he wanted Will to be unashamed of his authentic self and overcome his constant state of internal conflict.

In Hannibal's eyes, it was a crime that Will stifled himself in any way. It was akin to hiding a masterpiece with a cheap covering.

He truly wanted what was best for Will, and he hoped that Will's appearance now would give him another opportunity to make that happen.

"I'm glad you came," Hannibal shared, taking a few steps towards the glass.

He did not miss the way Will swallowed thickly as he closed the gap between them.

"My other callers are all… professional," Hannibal continued. It was obvious that he was labeling Will as a personal caller, no matter if Will was trying to be professional. Hannibal was simply calling it like it was.

Will did not flinch at being called a personal visitor, and Hannibal continued his polite small-talk.

"Banal psychiatrists and grasping second-raters," he explained lightly. "Pencil-lickers."

Will's face was still utterly expressionless. "I want you to help me, Dr. Lecter."

"Yes, I thought so," Hannibal said swiftly, eyes boring directly into Will's. "Are we no longer on a first-name basis?"

“I’m more comfortable the less personal we are,” Will said stiffly.

Hannibal tilted his head, as if in a challenge. As if he and Will could ever be separated from each other in any meaningful way, even after three years of no contact. As if Hannibal wasn’t the only person who knew Will so intimately that there was no hope in hiding anything from him.

“I smell dogs,” Hannibal replied unblinkingly. “And pine, and oil beneath that shaving lotion.” He paused. “It’s something a child would select, isn’t it? Is there a child in your life, Will?”

Hannibal’s gaze became more intense as his voice dropped in volume. “I gave you a child, if you recall.”

Will still stared back at Hannibal, not breaking eye contact, but Hannibal was pleased to see that his words struck a chord in Will when his eyes slightly misted over, and he opened his mouth before closing it, wordless.

“I came about Chicago and Buffalo,” he got out on his second try. “You’ve read about it.”

Hannibal allowed the subject change. “I’ve read the papers. I can’t clip them, they won’t let me have scissors, of course. You want to know how he’s choosing them.”

“Thought you’d have some ideas,” Will replied stoically.

Hannibal exhaled slightly in amusement, seeing right through Will’s reasoning that he no doubt rehearsed to Jack and himself, to justify this visit.

Will did not need to come visit Hannibal to develop some theories about the Tooth Fairy. He was a good profiler in his own right, quite competent in generating potential explanations for this newest killer’s actions.

“You just came here to look at me,” Hannibal murmured. “Came to get to the old scent again.” His eyes searched Will’s. “Why don’t you just smell yourself?”

That got a reaction. Will scoffed lowly, looking away from Hannibal and finally breaking their charged eye contact. He knew that Hannibal was simply speaking the truth, but judging by that reaction, he did not quite want to face it yet. Will did not want to face that he and Hannibal were two sides of the same coin, their souls made of the same primordial material.

He may not want to face it, but Hannibal was not kind enough to let him forget it.

“I expected more of you, doctor,” Will responded with a hint of attitude after pulling himself together. “That routine is old hat.”

“Whereas you are a new man,” Hannibal interjected, stepping forward again. “Are you a good father, Will?”

What sort of father would you be?

I’d be a good father.

The words from an old conversation, years ago, echoed in Hannibal’s mind — and from the way Will looked back at him, he was thinking of them as well.

Hannibal was graceful enough not to require a reply to his question, and switched subjects before Will decided to storm out.

“Let me have the file. An hour, and we can discuss it like old times,” he said with a small smile.

Emotion was showing on Will's face now, but interestingly, it did not bleed into his voice when he opened his mouth. "Thank you."

A moment passed, then Will turned and walked to the drop-box at the far corner of Hannibal's cell. Hannibal followed, mirroring his movements so that it appeared that they were one being; a man, and his reflection in the glass. Hannibal thought it was fitting.

Will slid the file into the slot and Hannibal gazed at him through the glass.

"Family values may have declined over the past century, but we still help our families when we can." Hannibal searched Will's face, then spoke honestly. "You are family, Will."

Will looked back at him with big eyes and a pinched expression, like he was on the verge of either yelling at Hannibal or crying. For the first time in their entire reunion, he seemed vulnerable.

Hannibal was glad that he brought out the real Will, and he did it by being honest about his feelings. He did not mock Will, or confront him, or mislead him. He was honest, and that emotional genuineness was what pierced Will's armor.

He resolved to be more honest, in the future. What was the point in hiding anything, now? They were no longer playing games of shadows in the dark. They were both fully exposed to each other, or at least Hannibal wanted to be. He wanted Will to look at him and *see* him, not shy away from the sight because he feared what it might make him realize.

Will continued looking at Hannibal for a moment longer, then swallowed roughly again and quickly walked out of the room.

Hannibal watched him go, unmoving. The seal had been broken, and Will would return to him.

“It’s good to see you looking so well, Will,” Alana said from the posh couch in her office that was once Chilton’s. “But I can’t help wishing you weren’t here.”

“Wishing and hoping,” Will replied.

Will could tell from her redecorating that she tried to erase Chilton from the space, but he thought that all she managed to do was capture his arrogance. Will had entered the room and immediately gone to the window, turning away from Alana and her open posture that was a textbook therapy move. He always knew her little tricks.

He was starting to know Hannibal’s, as well.

“How did it feel to see him again?” Alana asked.

Will sighed, trying to find the words for everything he felt while standing in front of his caged monster.

“Like Hannibal was looking through to the back of my skull,” he said quietly. “Felt like a fly flitting around back there.”

Will had tried his best to be closed off while talking to Hannibal. He entered with a blank expression, did not discuss anything emotional, and tried to resist any of Hannibal’s attempts to needle him. *Tried* being the operative word.

He was a fool for thinking that he’d ever be able to hide his feelings from Hannibal. Will had hidden things from him before, like when he had acted (had he really acted?) like a killer to entrap Hannibal right after Will had gotten out of prison, or three years ago when he’d tricked Hannibal into turning himself in. But even though Will had hidden *things* from Hannibal before, he’d never been able to hide his *feelings.*

“I had the absurd feeling that he walked out with me,” Will confessed. “I had to stop outside the doors, look around, make sure I was alone.”

It really did feel like that, but what Will refrained from telling Alana was that it also felt natural. It felt freeing, like the part of Hannibal inside Will had finally been unleashed from captivity.

Will hadn’t walked out of that room with Hannibal, but he wanted to.

The thought entranced him as much as it terrified him.

“I know that feeling,” Alana assured.

Will sincerely doubted that she did.

“Well, at least Jack Crawford is pleased,” Alana spoke, cracking a smile.

Will laughed dryly.

“He showed me pictures of the families. I looked at Molly and Walter, and I couldn’t say no,” Will said, avoiding eye contact.

The lie tasted bitter on his lips, but he wasn’t about to admit to Alana the real reason he’d come back. She probably knew anyway, deep down.

“And Jack was counting on it,” Alana nodded.

Will sighed again, then sat down heavily on the couch. He had to wait an hour for Hannibal to review the case file, and he wasn’t stubborn enough to stand by the window when his body

was exhausted from his recent conversation with Hannibal.

"You still with Margot?" Will asked, wanting to direct the conversation away from himself and/or Hannibal.

"Yes," Alana smiled.

Well, the expensive décor and clothing made sense then, Will thought.

"We have a baby," Alana continued. "A Verger baby." She smiled wider. "A son."

"Oh," Will responded blankly. "Good for Margot."

Instead of joy for his former friends, there was a sinking feeling in his stomach, and Will realized he made a mistake in asking about Margot.

She had gotten a child after Hannibal had, indirectly, taken one from her and left her with a scar. Hannibal had *directly* done the same to Will, and in theory Will had also gained a child now in Walter — but in reality, it wasn't the same.

It should be. Will should have moved on and started a family, just like Margot had done. He tried in Molly and Walter, but talking to Alana about it now made him realize that it wasn't the same. He didn't feel like he had moved on at all. His belly itched from the scar Hannibal had left him, and he refrained from scratching it by curling his fist on Alana's leather couch.

Hannibal's words about family, spoken just a few minutes ago in that shadowy cell, swirled in Will's mind.

You're family, Will.

Will hated himself for it, but Hannibal really did feel like his family more than Molly or Walter did.

"Good for me, I carried him," Alana replied, teasingly indigent and pulling Will out of his spiral of self-hatred. "He's my son. He's the Verger heir."

Will took a breath, still avoiding eye contact. "So what are you doing here?"

Alana's playful expression turned serious. "There are only five doors between Hannibal and the outside. And I have the keys to all of them."

Will turned his face away.

"Hannibal's never been great with boundaries," Alana noted.

Will could feel her gaze studying him, and he hated her concern.

"*He who sups with the Devil needs a long spoon,"* she pointedly quoted.

Will glanced at her directly for the first time in their entire conversation, then looked away as he rose from the couch and fled to the window. He knew what she was implying, and he really did not want to discuss it.

"I'm not letting him in, Alana," Will grumbled. "Don't worry about me."

It was a warning for her to back off. The days when he confided in her were long gone. His business with Hannibal was *his*, nobody else's. Not Alana's, and not Jack's. Although, he had a feeling that they wouldn't get off his case about his visits to Hannibal so easily.

Visits, plural, Will thought to himself. He already knew that this first one wouldn't be the last. Once the seal had been broken, it would not be easily reconstructed.

"I'm not just worried about you," Alana said calmly. "Last time, it didn't end with you."

Will turned back to face her. It may not have ended with Will, but it was about him. It was all about him, in Hannibal's world.

Being the focus of someone's attention so much was overwhelming, and Will didn't know what to do with it or how to feel about it. He just knew that he had a chance to manipulate Hannibal with it.

But if that awful night in Hannibal's kitchen taught Will anything, it was that he was taking a huge risk by continuing to play this game. He was diving into the deep waters where the beast dwelled, and he ran the risk of being swallowed up.

He ran the risk of unleashing his own inner beast.

Will left Alana's office after that, no longer interested in talking with her. Some time still remained before he was due back in Hannibal's cell, so Will lingered in the halls of the BSHCI like an old ghost.

When the allotted hour came, Will straightened his spine, breathed once, and walked back to the battlefield.

"This is a very shy boy, Will," Hannibal greeted, looking up from where he was seated at the metal table in the center of his cell, still considering the case file. "I would love to meet him."

Will curled his lip. "I'm sure you would."

He walked forward and could almost imagine them back in Hannibal's office, hovered around the thick wooden desk that they always gravitated towards when having their more emotional conversations.

"Have you considered the possibility that he's disfigured?" Hannibal asked lightly. "Or that he may believe he's disfigured?"

Will maintained his blank expression. "That's interesting."

Hannibal smiled slightly. "That's not interesting. You thought of that before."

He was right, of course. Will was not surprised to have Hannibal call him out, but still felt a jolt of pleasure when he did. It felt nice to know that Hannibal still knew him better than anyone else did.

"He smashed all the mirrors in the houses, not just enough to get the pieces he wanted," Will narrated, aware that Hannibal already knew all this but needing to maintain some barrier of professionalism. "These shards are set so that he can see himself in Mrs. Jacobi's eyes."

Hannibal rose from behind the desk and walked closer. "Could you see yourself in their eyes, Will? Killing them all?"

Will closed his eyes and didn't grace him with the answer, one that Hannibal already knew. That was the way his empathy worked, picturing himself as the perpetrator and mercilessly slaughtering his victims. It had not changed, after three years of purposefully not empathizing with killers. Will fell back into it as easy as breathing.

He could see the display of the bodies, and he could smell the fresh blood sprayed around them. He saw himself killing the families, and he saw what came afterward. It felt natural, after the initial jolt of connection.

"The first small bond to the killer itches and stings like a leech," Hannibal murmured.

It did, but only for a moment. The process didn't bother Will as much as it used to, and he wasn't sure if that was good or bad.

"Like you, Will, he needs a family to escape what's inside of him."

Will sighed. Hannibal always knew how to make connections between him and the killers he was empathizing with. The worst part wasn't that Hannibal was trying to blur Will's boundaries about where he ended and the killer began, but that he was simply speaking the truth. Hannibal *knew* what Will was trying to accomplish with Molly and Walter and threw it in his face, not allowing Will to hide from it.

He had always been rather good at making Will face the unpleasant parts of himself.

But Will didn't give into the bait this time, and Hannibal moved past his silence.

"You know a fair amount about how these families died," he observed. "How they lived is how he chooses them."

Will swallowed. "How is he choosing them?"

Hannibal tilted his head. "How did you choose yours?"

Again, Will stubbornly remained silent.

"Ready-made wife and child to serve your needs," Hannibal continued. "A stepson, or daughter. A stepson absolves you of any biological blame. You know better than to breed. Can't pass on those terrible traits you fear the most."

As Hannibal turned away, Will realized something. Hannibal was trying far too hard to wound Will with his words on this subject. His tone was light, but his words held more depth. Hannibal was not simply speaking out of a desire to mock Will; he was personally offended by Will's new family. He was *jealous*.

Will didn't know what to do with that information, so he stayed silent and watched Hannibal as he kept speaking.

"Why are there no descriptions of the grounds? I see floor plans, diagrams of the rooms where death occurred," Hannibal said. "What were the yards like?"

He turned back to Will, and Will met his gaze.

"Big, fenced, with trees," Will replied, remembering the houses. "Why?"

Hannibal's mouth curved upwards. "If this pilgrim feels a special relationship with the moon, he might like to go outside and look at it, before he tidies himself up. If one were nude, say, it would be better to have outdoor privacy for that sort of thing." His smile grew larger. "One must show some consideration for the neighbors."

Will considered that, and imagined himself outside the Jacobi's house at night, the darkness somewhat melted away under the bright light of the full moon. Hannibal was there with him, studying him with a glint in his eyes.

"Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will?" Hannibal murmured. "It appears quite black."

Will had not. He wondered if he ever would, or if he'd be limited to imagining it.

Not ten minutes after Will left, Hannibal was gifted with the presence of Alana, who required Hannibal to be fully restrained, save for his mask, before she entered his cell.

Once Hannibal was decently prepared, Alana walked into the room with a displeased expression, closing the door with a loud thud and not-so-casually strolling to the desk, behind where Hannibal stood tethered near the glass.

“You’ve come to wag your finger?” Hannibal presumed.

“I love a good finger-wagging,” she deadpanned.

“Yes, you do,” Hannibal quipped. “How is Margot?”

Alana ignored him. “Your cogs are turning, Hannibal. I can hear them clicking.”

Hannibal clucked his tongue. “Click, click… boom.”

“I don’t know what you’re planning with Will Graham,” Alana drawled. “But you’re planning something.”

Hannibal remained silent.

“Why wouldn’t you be?” Alana continued. “You’ve already cracked the lid, can’t resist peeling it back.”

Hannibal quite liked that metaphor. Once again, he had succeeded in cracking the lid of Will’s mind, and now he was determined to unleash the beautiful horrors within.

“Will came to me,” Hannibal began.

“Yes, he did,” Alana sighed.

“I advised him against it,” Hannibal pointed out.

“I’m sure,” Alana said dryly.

“Are you suggesting I don’t have Will’s best interests in my mind?” Hannibal inquired.

He could hear Alana almost laugh. “I’m stating it as fact.”

Annoyance shot through Hannibal then. He did not care what others, besides Will, thought of his actions, but it was insulting for Alana to say to him that he did not care about Will’s best interests. He was the *only one* who cared about Will’s best interests.

He was also the only one who truly knew what would be best for Will. Although he was certain that Will knew himself too, deep down. He just refused to admit it.

“You’ve got Will dressed up in moral-dignity pants,” Hannibal noted. “Nothing is his fault.”

Truly, Alana was in denial about Will’s true nature and what was best for him. Hannibal was under no such delusions — he saw Will for exactly who he was, and loved him for it.

He found it quite satisfying to imagine when Alana, Jack, and Will’s play-pretend family inevitably saw Will’s moral-dignity pants get ripped off, showing who he truly was. The reveal would be stunning, and Hannibal couldn't wait to bear witness to it.

He had every intention to coax it out of Will, because it was the best thing for him. As Alana said, the lid had already been peeled back. All Hannibal had to do now was entice Will’s true self to the surface.

“I’ve been courteous, and you’ve been receptive to courtesy,” Alana said coolly. “But these niceties are conditional, and the conditions are non-negotiable.”

She came up behind Hannibal, and he inclined his head.

“I must behave myself,” he summed up.

Alana leaned in closer and spoke quietly. “I know what you’re afraid of. It’s not pain, or solitude. It’s indignity.” She smiled. “You’re a little bit like a cat that way.”

Then she leaned back and raised her voice. “I’ll take your books. I’ll take your drawings. I’ll take your toilet.”

She walked back to the door to Hannibal’s cell, then paused.

“You’ll have nothing but indignity,” she warned, “and the company of the dead.”

Hannibal felt rage surge up inside him, but carefully kept his face blank. He knew this was a possibility after he talked to Will, but he wouldn’t let Alana’s threats of punishment dissuade his plans. Will was *worth* losing his dignity for.

In Hannibal’s eyes, Will was worth everything.

Alana walked out, leaving Hannibal alone in his cell to ponder which wine she would best be paired with.

After taking a tiny step forward in the investigation by discovering the link of poisoned pets, Will rushed out of FBI headquarters before Jack could interrogate him about his visit to Hannibal. He'd have to be satisfied with the pet angle, for now.

Will had his own leads to follow up on.

He got in his rental car and drove to the airport, then took a last-minute flight up to Buffalo. He'd see the Jacobi house first-hand and get back to Virginia before nightfall.

He didn't want to be in that backyard under the light of the moon.

Will made it to the Jacobi's house in a couple hours, forgoing the actual house and drifting into the backyard. He wasn't sure what he was looking for, but Hannibal's words about blood in the moonlight echoed in his mind.

He wandered around the backyard and, finding nothing of importance, climbed over the back wire fence. He felt as if he was being pulled to something, and followed his instincts.

After walking a few steps past trees and brush, he found a chopped piece of wood, set sideways on the ground like a stool.

This could be it. A trace of the killer.

Will sat on the wood, and immediately something caught the corner of his eye. He turned his head to find a symbol engraved on the tree beside him, and exhaled slowly. That symbol had undoubtedly been made by the Tooth Fairy, so it held some sort of significance for him.

"I sat here," Will said quietly, allowing his empathy to take over. "And I watched them."

He stayed there for a while, getting up only when he hit a wall in the killer's mind. His foot nudged something as he stood, and Will looked down to see a gnawed apple core.

Jack would be pleased when he returned with two leads to the killer.

Will pulled a spare evidence bag from his coat pocket, which he'd snagged from the lab before catching his flight up here. He carefully picked up the apple core with his gloved hand and dropped it into the bag, then took out his phone to snap a decent picture of the engraved symbol on the tree.

He'd seen everything there was to see here, now. There was no reason to dwell in the Jacobi's backyard any longer.

Will pushed his way through the brush again, climbing over the wire fence a second time. Once he righted himself and turned towards the direction of his waiting taxi, he groaned.

A familiar figure with fiery red hair was waiting for him. Freddie must have clocked him at the BSHCI earlier and followed him to Quantico, then all the way up here. It appeared that it was still her personal mission to make Will's life hell.

"Now are you just keeping America clean, or is that evidence?" she called.

Will pocketed the apple core and approached her, trudging through the snow. "You're trespassing, Freddie."

"I was trespassing before the blood dried," she shrugged. "When'd they call you in?"

Will didn't slow his pace. "I'm not talking to you."

"We're co-conspirators, Will," she said slyly. "I died for you and your cause."

That made Will pause in his stride, and he turned to face her.

“You didn’t die enough,” he grumbled.

Freddie gave him an unimpressed look, and suddenly Will was unleashing all his complaints about Freddie Lounds directly to the source.

“You came into my hospital room while I was sleeping, slipped back the covers, and snapped a photo of my temporary colostomy bag,” Will accused.

“I covered your junk with a black box,” Freddie replied, then looked down pointedly. “A big black box. You’re welcome.”

Will’s disgruntled expression did not change.

“You called us *murder husbands*,” he spat.

Somehow, to Will, that offense ranked higher than the colostomy bag picture.

“You did run off to Europe together,” Freddie said mildly. “How does the Tooth Fairy compare to Hannibal Lecter?”

Will wanted to scoff. There was no comparison.

“Haven’t seen anything like this since the massacre at Muskrat Farm,” Freddie continued. “Funny thing about that massacre: not only did Dr. Bloom survive, she got rich. Lecter’s living in the lab under her care. What kind of arrangement do you suppose they have?”

“A complicated arrangement,” Will dismissed.

Freddie nodded slowly. “Couldn’t be more complicated than your relationship with Hannibal.”

Will sighed deeply.

“You paid him a visit?” Freddie pressed. “Before you lie, know that I know you did.”

“Goodbye, Freddie,” Will replied and walked away, done with this pathetic excuse for a conversation.

“*Federal manhunters, stymied in their search for the Tooth Fairy, have turned to the most savage killer in captivity for help*,” Freddie narrated, quoting what must be the working title of her next article. “'*It takes one to catch one,’ a federal official told this reporter.* ”

Will paused in displeasure. “Takes one to catch one? You referring to Hannibal Lecter, or me?”

“I’ll let my readers decide,” Freddie answered behind him. “If you’re smart, you’d use me. All psychopaths are narcissists, they love to read about themselves!”

Will rolled his eyes and walked away, making sure to flip Freddie off before sliding into the backseat of his taxi.

He made it back to Virginia in good time.

After picking up his rental car from the airport, he drove straight back to his hotel with hands gripping the steering wheel tight. All he wanted to do was go straight to the BSHCI, see Hannibal, and discuss what he’d found at the Jacobi’s.

The image of Hannibal's smirk at the sight of Will coming to visit him twice in one day, after three years of nothing, kept Will from turning to Baltimore. He wouldn't give Hannibal that satisfaction, even if he wanted to.

Will did stop by Quantico, however. He had to drop off the evidence to Jack, who looked so pleased at the discovery that he didn't even ask Will how his visit to Hannibal went.

He did tell Will about the Leeds's dog, and how it had been transferred to the FBI to examine for evidence. Price and Zeller found nothing on him, of course, so they were going to send him back to the shelter in Chicago.

Will couldn't let that happen.

He drove back to the motel, making sure to stop and pick up dinner for himself and the new dog that was happily panting in the passenger seat.

Will wasn't sure what he'd name his new pet. Jack hadn't bothered to tell Will his name, but Will had plenty of experience naming strays.

He thought he'd ask Molly about it. She always had good names for the dogs they rescued.

He dialed the phone, and on the second ring Molly picked up.

"Hello, hotshot," she greeted warmly. "Doing some good?"

Will supposed he'd made progress today. He'd seen Hannibal.

"Nothing you'd notice," Will replied. He thought about it more, taking inventory of his feelings after seeing Hannibal. "I'm lonesome."

“Me too,” Molly hummed. “I’m feeling Randy.”

Will nodded, noticing that he also felt a bit aroused. He’d been on edge all day for some reason.

“Me too,” he stated.

Molly laughed from the other end of the line. “Randy’s our new dog.”

“Oh, hell,” Will smiled, then actually let out a laugh. He thought maybe he’d be blessed with some phone sex, but it turned out Molly had done exactly what he’d done today — gotten a new dog.

“Randy’s got *huge* balls,” Molly confided with amusement.

Will laughed some more, the temporary joy feeling nice and distracting him from everything else floating inside his mind.

“Never mind about his balls,” Will chuckled.

“They almost drag on the ground,” Molly continued, ignoring him. “He has to retract them when he runs. Can you retract yours?”

Will’s laughter faded away, leaving him with a pleasant buzz.

“I retracted them once when I was a kid,” he recalled. “Had to clear a barbed-wire fence, carrying a stolen watermelon.”

It was a good memory. He'd loved watermelon, but his dad had always been too poor to waste money on anything that wasn't canned food and booze. Stealing that watermelon had been something Will did for himself, and he savored every last bite of it when he finally got it cracked open.

Molly laughed. "Criminal mind even at that age."

The smile instantly vanished from Will's face, and despair set in again. He didn't want to have a criminal mind, he didn't want to give in to the darkness inside him that Hannibal was so enchanted by.

"I don't have a criminal mind," Will murmured.

There was a pause.

"Of course you don't," Molly reassured quietly.

There was another silence, and Will changed the subject.

"We have a *new* new dog," he offered.

"Newer than Randy?" Molly asked in disbelief.

"Yeah. Belonged to one of the families," Will said. "There was no one left to claim her, so I claimed her."

Will could hear Molly's smile through the phone.

“You’re a very sweet man. I love you, and I miss you, and you’re doing the right thing,” she replied gently. “It’s costing you too, I know that. I’m here, and I’ll be here whenever you come home.”

Will did not feel any better after hearing her words — in fact, he felt worse.

When you come home, she said, so confidently. Will knew that it was more of a question of *if* than when. He didn’t know if this case, if reconnecting with Hannibal, would finally unlock that “criminal mind” inside him that he’d been holding back so desperately. He was afraid that he was losing his motivation to fight it.

He was afraid of the fact that, every day he was here and Hannibal was on his mind — more so than usual — he was rapidly losing his ability to care about holding part of himself back.

He was starting to think that maybe Hannibal was right. Constantly fighting himself was exhausting.

The thought terrified him.

“Goodnight, Molly,” Will finally responded, and hung up the phone.

He was tired, and it would do no good to think about Molly, or Hannibal, or himself any longer tonight.

When he woke up from an awful nightmare a few hours later, in which he had killed Molly and seen parts of himself fall away, instead of piece together, Will knew that his mental state had officially crossed the line from *concerning* to *disastrous.*

Hannibal looked at his visitor with unconcealed delight, happy to have an old friend to play with.

"As I live and breathe," he proclaimed cheekily. "I thought I'd seen the last of you, Jack."

Jack Crawford stared back at him through the glass, unimpressed. "Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal's sharp eyes surveyed his appearance. "You're dressing younger. Have you taken up some sport you enjoy with a new partner?" His mouth twitched in a smirk. "Tennis, maybe?"

"You've taken up your sport with an old partner," Jack pointed out, matching Hannibal's smile.

Hannibal inclined his head. "I wrote Will a note, warning him you'd come calling."

"Yes, I read your note," Jack responded politely. "Before my office forwarded it to Will."

"To whet his appetite, or yours?" Hannibal wondered. "You've placed him back in the pot, and you're letting him cook."

Hannibal would not be held responsible for Will being placed in the pot. Only for letting him cook, and come out of the pot a transformed, delicious meal begging to be tasted.

He'd longed to know how Will tasted, and thanks to Jack Crawford, he might finally get what he wanted.

"We're all in this stew together, doctor," Jack said.

Hannibal studied him. "It would be more honest if you ate his brain right out of his skull."

He smiled, and Jack narrowed his eyes.

“And you’re nothing if not honest,” he stated.

Hannibal walked around his table leisurely, slowly approaching Jack on the other side of the glass.

“This shy boy has already seen Will,” he said lightly. “He already knows his name. Are you chumming the waters, Jack?”

Jack kept eye contact with him, unafraid. “It takes one to catch one.”

“It takes *two* to catch one,” Hannibal corrected.

Jack nodded slightly. “Will has never been more effective than he is with you inside his head.”

“I agree,” Hannibal replied mildly. “But don’t think you can persuade me to play along with appeals to my intellectual vanity.”

“I don’t think I’ll persuade you, doctor,” Jack smiled. “You’ll either play, or you won’t.”

Hannibal considered that for a moment. Then, he stepped closer to Jack.

“Bella used to say your face was all scars, if you knew how to look,” he mused. “There’s always room for a few more.” He tilted his head. “How much room does Will have, Jack?”

Jack eyed him for a second, then turned and walked away.

Hannibal smiled. In his opinion, Will still had room for a few more scars. He only hoped that this time, those scars sent Will running towards him, instead of away.

His beloved deserved a beautiful becoming, and Hannibal was honored that he may have the chance to be a part of it. He could feel it approaching fast, like ozone foretells a storm.

He couldn’t wait to give Will all that he deserved.

Chapter End Notes

I greatly appreciate anyone still reading this <3

And the Woman Clothed In Sun

Chapter Summary

> “You didn’t lose yourself Bedelia, you just crawled so far up his ass that you couldn’t be bothered,” Will sassed.
>
> She smiled slightly. “Hello, Will.”

Chapter Notes

> Sorry again for the long wait!! I have a break from school and other responsibilities so I'm hoping that my updates will be more frequent. Sorry this one's a bit short too, not much happened in the episode in terms of Will and Hannibal's relationship and development, and there was only one missing scene I added.
>
> That being said, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will purposefully waited in the hall until the lecture was nearly finished.

He had no desire to listen to Bedelia lie through her teeth. He was here for one reason, and one reason only: to talk to her about Hannibal.

He hated to admit it, but she was the only other person who knew Hannibal even remotely close to how well Will knew him. In some ways, she knew him better. They’d lived together as a full-fledged married couple in Italy, after all.

Will was still curious about how she managed to get that close to him, and walk away perfectly fine. Curious, and angry. Did Hannibal like her more than Will? Was that why she was completely unscathed, while Will was absolutely covered in scars?

He was here to find out. Bedelia would have the answers.

Will didn't stop to ponder why he was more pissed at Bedelia than at Hannibal about the differential treatment.

He strolled into the lecture hall then, making sure to make charged eye contact with Bedelia. She did not seem surprised to see him, and Will lingered in front of the door for a few moments before slowly moving to find an empty seat.

"... Deeply felt truths about myself as Bedelia Du Maurier were smoke and mirrors of the highest order."

She paused, and Will felt her gaze follow him as he sat down.

"What we take for granted about our sense of self," she continued, walking up the aisle towards Will, "everything we see, everything we remember, is nothing more than a construct of the mind."

She set her hand on Will's shoulder. To the rest of the audience it appeared as a friendly gesture by the lecturer to be engaging, but to Will it was a pointed message. She was telling Will that his sense of self was the most unstable of them all, the most susceptible to the beast she was describing.

Will felt irritation rise up inside him. Bedelia always reminded him of Hannibal's hold over him whenever she had the chance, but not because she wanted to help him. It was because she loathed the idea of someone else occupying space in Hannibal's mind like she did.

Will knew that feeling all too well. It was what drove him to be here today.

He wouldn't succeed in erasing Bedelia from Hannibal's mind today, but maybe he would soon. That would be magnificent.

But first, he had to know the nature of the infestation in order to exterminate it.

"Dante was the first to conceive of Hell as a planned space," she explained in her slow voice. "An urban environment. Before Dante, we spoke not of the Gates of Hell, but of the Mouth of Hell."

Bedelia walked back to her front podium, and turned to face the audience.

"My journey to damnation began when I was swallowed by the Beast."

Everyone around Will clapped, but he did not raise his hands. He did not even smile. He simply sat in his chair, stared at Bedelia, and waited.

After Bedelia was done speaking to a few eager minds, and everyone had left, Will made his way over to her. He had intended to see her and say his piece, demanding to know how she had survived Italy. He was also curious about how she came to be who she was now; he still remembered the timid, frightened woman who visited him at the BSHCI and sat in front of him in that FBI interview room.

Has he ever tried to persuade you to kill anybody?

He will. And it will be somebody you love.

He'd liked her at that time for what she'd done, but things had changed. Bedelia had come a long way since trying to warn Will, or help him. She looked at him with nothing but condescension and smugness now, and Will hated it. He hated a lot of things about Bedelia.

So even though he came here with a clear idea of what to say to her, he felt those plans slip away as his anger and loathing grew hotter and hotter.

“Poor Dr. Du Maurier,” Will mocked as he strolled towards her. “Swallowed whole. *Suffering* inside Hannibal Lecter’s *bowels* for what must’ve felt like an eternity.”

She said nothing, and only watched him approach her like a cheetah approaching a hyena.

“You didn’t lose yourself Bedelia, you just crawled so far up his ass that you couldn’t be bothered,” Will sassed.

She smiled slightly. “Hello, Will.”

Will looked around the lecture hall, taking in the high-quality auditorium with distaste.

“You hitched your star to a man commonly known as a monster.” Will turned his gaze to her and raised his eyebrows mockingly. “You’re the Bride of Frankenstein.”

“We’ve both been his bride,” she replied, unbothered.

Will ignored her and took off his glasses to make unobscured eye contact. “How did you manage to walk away unscarred? I’m covered in scars.”

“I wasn’t myself,” Bedelia answered, meeting his stare. “You were. Even when you weren’t, you were.”

Will digested that. “I wasn’t wearing adequate armor.”

“No,” she affirmed. “You were naked.”

Will wanted to scoff. He felt more than just naked whenever he was in Hannibal’s presence. He felt seen, exposed, flayed open, and cut into. Hannibal was free to carve whatever scar he

wanted into Will, and Will had the power to do the same. Although he rarely had the chance to act on it.

"Have you been to see him?" she asked.

Will did not want to tell her, but Bedelia always had a way of seeing through him.

"Yes," he said.

"You haven't learned your lesson, have you?" She studied him. "Or did you just miss him that much?"

Will broke their eye contact.

He didn't want to admit, even to himself, just how much he missed Hannibal over the last three years. He didn't want to analyze what it might mean.

"Have *you* been to see him?" he asked instead.

Bedelia smirked at him like she knew exactly what button she'd pressed to knock him on his knees.

"I've seen enough of him," she smirked. Will narrowed his eyes, anger flaring inside him as he thought back to the apartment of *Mr. and Mrs. Fell.* He could read between the lines, and sense the physical nature of their relationship. It made him sick.

"I was with him behind the veil," she continued with sharp eyes. "You were always on the other side."

Will wanted to snap at her. How dare she say that she knows Hannibal better than him? That something separated him from Hannibal? That Hannibal showed her parts of himself that he'd never shown anyone else?

Will gritted his teeth. He was the only one with that privilege.

She's right though, part of himself whispered, deep inside. *She* was *with him, as a bystander. She allowed him to be himself, whereas you always tried to destroy him.*

Will was jealous that Bedelia got to see Hannibal like that. He never saw Hannibal kill before. He'd never seen that part of him.

As he realized he was jealous of Bedelia, he also realized that he *wanted* to see Hannibal kill, and was promptly disgusted with himself.

Bedelia regarded him for a moment longer, then turned to walk away.

Will snapped out of his internal struggle and backtracked. There was still so much he wanted to shake out of her, so much he needed to know.

"Something we should talk about," Will called.

Bedelia didn't look back. "You'll have to make an appointment."

She left, and Will remained in the lecture hall with blood boiling. Whether his rage was directed at himself, or at Bedelia, or even at Hannibal, he really couldn't say.

Hannibal put in a request to use the phone to call his attorney in the morning, and had to wait well into the afternoon before Alana granted it.

He had no problem waiting. He was waiting in this cell for three years so far for Will to come around and get him out, what was waiting a few hours for a phone call?

Especially if that phone call would quicken the process of Will's beautiful becoming.

Hannibal looked up from his given copy of *The Iliad* as the doors to his basement room banged open and his new favorite orderly, Denise, came in. She was rolling the phone cart in front of her, and Hannibal smiled. It was time.

"Go behind your worktable," she said sternly. Hannibal complied.

"If you approach the barrier before you hear the lock snap," she warned, "I'll mace you in the face. Understand?"

Hannibal inclined his head. ""Yes, indeed."

She moved to put the phone in Hannibal's drop-box, which only served to fuel Hannibal's good mood. He was quite looking forward to this task. It was one of his better ideas, and came to him last night while he'd been lying awake and thinking about Will.

"Thank you so much, Denise," Hannibal said politely as the orderly made her way out of the room to give Hannibal his privacy. The moment the doors closed shut, he was on the move.

Casually removing the necessary tools from his pocket, Hannibal placed them on top of the drop-box and reached inside to take his prize.

"Are you ready to make your call?"

“Yes, please,” Hannibal replied with delight.

The phone connected, then: “You have reached the law offices of Byron Metcalf — ”

Hannibal quickly unscrewed the end of the phone, folded the foil gum wrapper he’d saved from the one time last month Alana had gifted him mint gum for dessert — a sad excuse of a jab at Hannibal’s lack of proper dental hygiene equipment — and pressed it into the little crevice that contained the phone relays.

On the first try, he heard the dial tone. Success.

“Operator.”

Hannibal smiled. “Operator, I don’t have the use of my hands. Could you please ring 667-JL-5-0102?”

“Of course. Have a nice day.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal said gracefully.

The third time the phone connected, it was exactly who Hannibal wanted to hear.

“Dr. Frederick Chilton’s office.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “Is this Linda?”

“Linda doesn’t come in on weekends,” was the reply.

“Maybe you could help me, if you don’t mind,” Hannibal proposed smoothly. “This is Bob Greer at Blaine and Edwards Publishing. Dr. Chilton asked me to send a copy of his book to someone, and Linda was supposed to give me the address and phone number, but she never did.”

“She’ll be in on Monday,” said the voice, bored.

Hannibal’s lip twitched.

“I have to catch Federal Express in about five minutes, and I don’t want to bother Frederick at home,” Hannibal said smoothly. “It’s right there in his contacts. I’ll dance at your wedding if you’ll read it to me.”

He’d always been good at persuading people to do things. One tired and bored weekend secretary wasn’t above his manipulations.

There was a sigh. “I’m opening the file.”

“Be a darling and slide the cursor down to the letter *G*,” he instructed sweetly. “Give it a click, and I’ll be out of your hair.”

“Alright,” the voice responded. “What was the name?”

Hannibal’s smile widened.

“Graham. Will Graham.”

Bedelia's house was just as Will expected. Dusty, minimalist, and a bit retro. It reflected its owner well.

Neither of them spoke as Will knocked on the door, Bedelia answered, and they proceeded into the living room that also seemed to serve as Bedelia's office for seeing patients. Well, if she had any patients left to see.

"How's retirement?" Will asked, taking a seat on the uncomfortable felt chair.

Bedelia sat down across from him and folded her hands. "It could be better, especially as of late."

Will rolled his eyes at the passive-aggressive statement. Out of all the things he hated about Bedelia, her roundabout way of speaking had to be one of the worst. The way she talked reminded Will of a baby wolf — it seemed harmless, but if you bothered to look carefully, you'd notice its sharp teeth.

"I certainly didn't plan on receiving any more referrals from Hannibal, even indirectly," Bedelia reflected, crossing her legs. "You must be in dire need of therapeutic help."

Will ignored her jab. "Have you had any contact with him?"

"He sends me greeting cards on Christian holidays and my birthday," she answered lightly. "He always includes a recipe."

Will smiled fondly at that.

"If he does end up eating you, Bedelia…" he drawled. "You'd have it coming."

Bedelia smiled back at him, tight-lipped.

“I can’t blame him for doing what evolution has equipped him to do.”

Will rolled his eyes. Of course Bedelia would take the “nature” side in the nature versus nurture debate. From all his experiences of witnessing the development of criminals, he wasn’t as black-and-white about it. Or as far into denial about Hannibal’s true nature.

The horror of the beast was that he *chose* to be that way, to mindfully rip flesh off a warm body and delicately chew it between his teeth.

“If we just do whatever evolution equipped us to do, murder and cannabilism are morally acceptable,” Will said dryly.

“They are acceptable,” Bedelia replied easily. “To murderers and cannibals.”

She tilted her head. “And you.”

Will smiled. “And *you.”*

There was a pause, and they appraised each other like tigers scouting out the enemy in their territory.

“You lied, Bedelia,” Will noted. “You do that a lot. Why do you do that a lot?”

Her sharp eyes had not left his since their conversation started, and right now Will could see the faint annoyance hidden inside them.

“I obfuscate,” she corrected. “Hannibal was never *not* my patient.”

Will raised his eyebrow at that. If that was the route Bedelia had decided to take, then there were obvious unethical complaints about her conduct with a *patient.* Maybe he could drop an anonymous complaint to the state licensing board. It would be endlessly entertaining to see Bedelia stripped of her title.

"Covert treatment suffers secrecy and disapproval," Bedelia continued.

Will wanted to laugh. It sure did.

"Covert because… Hannibal was an uncooperative patient?" Will angled, already knowing that wasn't the reason.

"Covert because I was a cooperative psychiatrist," Bedelia deadpanned. *"Do no harm."*

Will curled his lip at the phrase.

"And did you?"

"I did," Bedelia said calmly. "Technically."

Now Will's lips curled upwards into a smile at her disclosure.

"You dared to care," he mocked.

Bedelia was silent for a moment.

"Not the first time I've lost professional objectivity in a matter where Hannibal is concerned," she murmured.

Will nodded. He knew the feeling.

Having something in common with Bedelia made his skin crawl. He was not like her, and his relationship with Hannibal was not like the one she had with him. For better or for worse.

“How is one patient worthy of compassion and another not?” Will wondered, continuing to poke at her.

“I’m under no illusions how morally consistent my compassion has been,” she said lightly. “How is one murderer worthy of compassion and not another?”

Will noticed the light sting of her words, but they did not bother him. He was well aware of the people he had killed, and did not expect any compassion for it.

“All that time you were with Hannibal, behind the veil,” Will said after a beat, “you’d already killed one patient.”

They stared at each other.

“Did it ever occur to you to kill another?” he murmured.

Bedelia seemed amused at his question.

“My relationship with Hannibal is not as passionate as yours,” she smirked softly. “You are here visiting an old flame.”

Will frowned at the obvious romantic connotation of her words.

“Is your *wife* aware of how intimately you and Hannibal know each other?” she drawled.

Will narrowed his eyes. “She’s aware enough.”

Lying through his teeth was a skill he’d mastered over the years. He’d only told Molly that he and Hannibal had been friends before he was caught. Nothing more, and nothing less.

Nothing seen, nor said, as Hannibal once told him.

The strategy worked for Will, and his marriage. The thought of telling Molly, sweet Molly, about all that he and Hannibal had been through together — all that Hannibal meant to him — was incomprehensible. He couldn’t even put it into words if he wanted to, it was all jumbled inside his chest and surrounding his heart in a vice grip.

But he didn’t want to, either. Will didn’t want to tell her about Hannibal, and he didn’t want to talk about his *feelings* about Hannibal with Bedelia right now, no matter how much she prodded him to do just that.

Bedelia raised her chin, eyes scanning Will like she knew he was lying — and he had no doubt that she was. Bedelia had always been one of the few, other than Will himself, that could read people as easily as reading a book.

They were evenly matched, in that regard. Will disliked it.

He focused on that dislike, combined it with his jealousy about her relationship with Hannibal and his annoyance about her barbed quips, and met her hard gaze with a threatening stare of his own.

“You couldn’t save Hannibal,” Bedelia mused. “Do you think you can save this new one?”

A spike of confusion pierced Will's anger. Why did Bedelia keep equating Hannibal and Molly, like his relationships with them were similar?

It seemed as if Bedelia was tired of his obvious puzzlement, because just then she slightly changed the subject.

"Your experience of Hannibal's attention is so profoundly harmful, yet so irresistible, it underlines your ability to think rationally," she noted slowly.

Will blinked. Her insight was… chillingly accurate.

He stubbornly did not respond, only looking at Bedelia with narrowed eyes.

She smiled slightly, then clasped her hands in her lap.

"You're walking down the street," she began, "and see a wounded bird in the grass. What's your first thought?"

Will's eyes glazed over, imagining the scenario. "It's vulnerable. I want to help it."

Bedelia's smile grew larger.

"My first thought is also that it's vulnerable," she confided. "And yet, I want to crush it."

Will was not surprised.

"A primal rejection of weakness which is every bit as natural as the nurturing instinct," she explained softly. "Of course, I wouldn't crush it. But my first thought is to do just that."

She tilted her head. “Isn’t it your first thought, too?”

“You and Hannibal have the same therapeutic approach,” Will complained. “It’s getting old.”

Bedelia studied him. “Is it? Or isn’t that exactly what you came here for?”

Will clenched his jaw shut. It felt bizarre, but he felt like the only person he could discuss his confusing, inner wrestling match of morality and true desires was Hannibal. He didn’t come to Bedelia to learn more about himself. He came to learn more about Hannibal, and to vent his frustrations onto a deserving party.

“One thing I learned from Hannibal is the alchemy of lies and truths,” Bedelia continued. “It’s how he convinced you you’re a killer.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “You’re not convinced?”

“You’re not a killer,” Bedelia dismissed. “You are capable of righteous violence because you are compassionate.”

Will wasn’t so sure about that. He still thought about how it felt to crunch Randall Tier’s bones with his hands.

“How are you capable?” Will chose to say, turning the focus back onto Bedelia.

Bedelia considered his question thoughtfully.

“Extreme acts of cruelty… require a high level of empathy,” she said.

Will nodded slowly. Her statement didn't make sense on its face, but he knew it was intended for him, the unstable man with a certified empathy disorder. Bedelia was giving him a justification of the violence he'd created.

He wasn't sure if he was ashamed of that explanation yet, or delighted by it.

"The next time you have an instinct to help someone…" Bedelia murmured, "you might consider crushing them instead. It might save you a great deal of trouble."

Will digested her words, and for the rest of their session he was lost in the possibilities of crushing someone, and imagining what it might feel like.

After his visit with Hannibal — which consisted, surprisingly, of Hannibal only commenting on the Red Dragon and not anything personal — Will returned to his motel with tired eyes.

Interacting with both Bedelia and Hannibal in one day was too much for any sane person to handle, and Will had not been sane in as long as he could remember. He needed to relax, or at least a distraction.

The Leeds's dog waiting for him when he got back helped a bit. He fed the dog with the food he picked up earlier, then ate his own dinner which consisted of fried catfish from a local restaurant. The food reminded him of New Orleans, and he thought about how drastically his life had changed since then.

The biggest changes were the people who'd entered his life, and brought something out of him.

Unwilling to allow his thoughts to stray to Hannibal, Will decided to focus on another person who'd affected him, albeit less so than the cannibal psychiatrist.

After finishing his meal, Will picked up the phone.

“Hi, Molly,” he greeted softly.

“Hey, handsome,” she replied warmly. “How’s it going?”

“As well as it can,” Will sighed.

Molly hummed, then paused.

“Have you been to see him?”

Will held back another sigh. He didn’t want to talk about Hannibal.

And how many people were going to ask him that?

“Yes,” he replied truthfully. Multiple times, in fact, but he wasn’t going to tell her that. “It was just as bad as I expected.”

“Oh, I bet it was,” Molly sympathized. “It’s okay to be scared of him, Will. He’s a horrible, terrifying man.”

Will furrowed his brow. Of all his many and complicated feelings towards Hannibal… fear had never truly been one of them. Even when he was cutting into Will with a little kitchen blade, or that saw.

Instead, most of the fear Will experienced was directed at himself.

Just like it always had been. Will’s empathy felt more like a curse than a blessing, but recently it wasn’t visions of other killers that scared him.

Will’s greatest fear was that one day, he wouldn’t be able to hold back the beast that prowled inside his chest, purring at his violence and growling at his morality. That monster had grown larger since Hannibal began to feed it, but it had always been there. Even in the past three years without Hannibal’s direct influence, the beast steadily grew stronger, despite Will’s fear.

He was scared of how much he’d come to bond with the beast, and enjoy its company.

Will wasn’t in the mood to lie any more today, so he didn’t respond to Molly’s comment and instead directed the conversation to her. He listened to her give updates about all the dogs, and how Wally was doing in school. Will hummed and laughed when necessary, but wasn’t able to truly lose himself to her words like he’d hoped.

They said goodbye when Molly yawned, ready for bed. Will hung up, turned off his phone, and rested his head against the scratchy material of the motel pillowcase.

His dreams were full of stags, wendigos, and great red dragons.

Chapter End Notes

A huge thank you to everyone who's reading and enjoying :)

And the Beast From the Sea

Chapter Summary

> “How’s the wife?” Hannibal inquired.
>
> “How’s my *wife?”* Will spat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal was more than pleased to learn that Will had the good fortune to meet the Great Red Dragon. He’d figured it would happen, and was delighted that his prediction proved correct.

As the Dragon told him about their encounter at the museum, Hannibal closed his eyes. The tinny voice over the phone faded away, and the dusty but clean smell of the Brooklyn Museum surrounded him. Hannibal had been there once before, when he’d explored New York in his younger days.

He could see Will entering the lobby, scanning the room devoid of tourists since the museum was closed on Tuesdays. He saw Will step towards the reception and request access to the research room where the original Blake painting was stored. He was quiet as always but a bit more confident when speaking, if Hannibal considered how timid Will was when they first met.

He didn’t press the Dragon for details but he could imagine the look of surprise on Will’s face when he met the man he’d been chasing, then a flash of pain on his face when the Dragon forcefully shoved him away. Will was a good fighter, but he’d been out of practice for three years.

Hannibal hoped to change that soon.

The Dragon's gravelly voice brought him back to the present. "Will Graham interests me. Odd-looking, for an investigator. Not very handsome, but… purposeful."

Hannibal did not smile. How the Dragon didn't see Will's incredible beauty was beyond him, and just showed how detached from reality this man truly was.

"He has a family," Hannibal noted. A fake, pathetic excuse for a family, that was.

He heard the Dragon's breath hitch through the line, an obvious tell of interest. This killer was giving Hannibal an amazing opportunity; he needed a different target for his violence than his girlfriend, and Hannibal was more than happy to provide one.

"Save yourself," Hannibal advised. "Kill them all."

Hannibal was in high spirits the next time Will visited.

"I'm not fortune's fool," Will said after setting his bag down on the table near the door. "I'm yours."

Hannibal allowed the left side of his mouth to curve up into a smile, the side that was facing away from Will as he stared up at the skylight in his cell. If Hannibal lifted his hand just right, he could imagine that he was looking up at the dome of the *Cappella Palatina.*

"Behold the Great Red Dragon," Will mocked.

"And did you?" Hannibal inquired, already knowing the answer.

Will's voice was hard. "The Brooklyn Museum is closed to the public on Tuesdays, but researchers are admitted. You knew that's when we'd both be going."

Hannibal lowered his hand and turned to gaze at Will as he approached the glass.

"A sophisticated intelligence can forecast many things." He smiled fully this time. "I suppose mine is sophisticated enough."

Will did not look amused.

"He's contacted you," he stated. It wasn't a question.

Hannibal loved it when Will could extrapolate truths from little crumbs of evidence. It was what made him a superb investigator, and what drew Hannibal to him in the first place. "Pure empathy", he'd called it once, combined with a beautiful mind and a *very* sophisticated intelligence.

He'd missed Will.

"How do you imagine he's contacted me?" Hannibal asked lightly, wanting to see Will in action again. "Personal ads? Writing notes of admiration on toilet paper?"

Disappointingly, Will didn't indulge him in sharing his thought process.

"There's a family out there who don't know he's coming," he warned. "We can save them."

Hannibal just looked at him, deep in the eyes, through the glass. Why did Will think he cared about any family other than their own?

“Tell me who he is,” Will entreated.

“I don’t know who he is,” Hannibal responded.

It was the truth; the Dragon had never told Hannibal his real name.

As he locked gazes with Will, he thought about family again, and opened his mouth.

“When you close your eyes, Will, is it your family you see?”

Will turned his face to the side, like he was ignoring the question. Like Hannibal couldn’t tell the crack of vulnerability and pain that showed beneath his visage of annoyance.

He was curious to hear the answer to his question. When Will closed his eyes, was it his new family that he saw? Did he see them alive and happy, or dead by the Dragon’s hand? By his *own* hand?

As much as the thought gave Hannibal satisfaction, he knew he preferred the other option. The option that when Will closed his eyes, he saw his family, his *real* family. He saw himself, Hannibal, and Abigail.

“How’s he choosing them?” Will demanded.

“Social media, I imagine,” Hannibal deadpanned. “Can’t be too careful with privacy settings.”

Will stared at him, and Hannibal stared back. Will’s face was contorted, his body tense, his eyes blazing with rage. Hannibal did not shy away from his clear displeasure, and instead took the moment to drink it in. Anger was such a beautiful look on Will.

“Do you know who they are?” he gritted out.

“Yes,” Hannibal replied mildly.

Will’s gaze shot daggers. “And you’re willing to let them die.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “They’re not my family, Will.”

Will blinked, and Hannibal saw the crack inside him growing larger at the reminder of who Hannibal’s family actually was. Of who *Will’s* family actually was.

“And I’m not letting them die,” he continued. “You are.”

He saw the anguish in Will’s eyes at more deaths being added to the mound of his responsibility, but Hannibal did not regret the words. He would say whatever it took for Will to realize that his true responsibility was to his real family, and not to others.

He wouldn’t push so hard as to challenge Will’s selfless instincts, but rather to make sure that his values and priorities were right where they needed to be — family first, as the saying went. Everything else was secondary.

Will turned on his heel, snatched his bag from the table, and walked out of Hannibal’s cell without another word.

When Will got the call, he quickly left the Leeds’s dog behind in his motel room and rushed to the hospital.

Molly and Walter had been taken to the closest hospital from their cabin, which of course was in Maine. Will's foot was heavy on the gas for the agonizingly long drive, and when he finally arrived at the hospital at a god-awful hour of the night he ran inside, jogging down the hallways.

He lost his speed when he looked through the surgery waiting room window to find Jack sitting with Wally. He stayed outside for a moment, having no idea how he was going to comfort this child who'd lost his real father a few years ago to cancer, and now might lose his mother to a bullet. A bullet that might as well have been shot into her by Will himself.

The tips of his fingers were prickling, usually an indicator that he was so weak, he was about to pass out. But this time, Will knew he wasn't going to pass out. He was just overwhelmed, to the point where he was emotionally numb and didn't know how to act.

Eventually Will's feet moved, and he nodded at Jack in the doorway before making his way to Wally.

The kid looked up at him once, unimpressed, before turning back to the magazine spread across his lap.

Will exhaled. At least he didn't seem worried, or sad. Will could deal with other people's anger a hell of a lot better than he could deal with their grief. His own grief had been weighing him down for years.

"Your mom is in surgery now," Will offered, for lack of anything else to say.

Wally was quiet for a moment.

"Is there anything else I need to know, to see about mom?" he asked.

Will shook his head slightly.

“You’re both safe here,” he said quietly, knowing it wasn’t the reassurance it ought to be.

Wally looked away. “This crazy guy wants to kill you?”

“No. Well,” Will struggled with his words. “We don’t know what he wants.”

“You gonna kill him?” Wally asked, without a thought.

Will swallowed and didn’t reply for a moment. This was possibly the most emotional conversation he’d ever had with the kid, in terms of Will’s spiking anxiety and shame, and somehow it turned to the possibility of Will killing someone. It was the very thing he’d spent years trying to avoid talking about, or even thinking about.

And now a child’s anger and ignorance were forcing Will to think about that beast lingering just beneath his skin.

“No,” Will finally replied. “I’m going to catch him. They’ll put him in a mental hospital so they can treat him, and keep him from hurting anybody else.”

Wally chewed his lips, like he didn’t quite buy what Will was selling.

“Tommy’s mom had this little newspaper,” he told Will. “Said you killed a guy, and *you* were put in a mental hospital.”

Will inhaled in slight panic and shifted in his seat. His past was something that he’d tried to keep from his new family. He’d never even told Molly that, and now Walter knew it from one of Freddie Lounds’s fucking Tattlecrime tabloids.

He could feel the numbness in his fingers growing, spreading to the rest of his hands.

“Is it… true?” Wally asked.

Will swallowed again, this time his throat tight with anxiety.

“Yes. Yes,” he forced himself to say. He put his head down for a moment, shame overtaking him. He’d killed people, and his stepson had found out and was asking about it. He wasn’t the father Wally should have.

Abigail wouldn’t have cared, Will’s mind whispered. *She would have already known, and understood. Just like Hannibal.*

Will clenched his eyes shut, hard enough to ignore the voices in his head whispering truths he wanted to stay blind to.

“It bothers you,” Will said to Wally, after opening his eyes and taking a breath. “Finding that out. Because I married your mom.”

Wally pursed his lips. “Then you shouldn’t put this guy in a mental hospital. You should kill him.”

He said it with anger, anger directed both at the Dragon for shooting his mom, and Will for not being there to shoot back. Will couldn’t do anything but stare at the kid, unable to say anything, until Wally spoke up again.

“I wanna watch baseball,” he muttered, getting up to go sit in front of the TV in the corner.

Will sat in his chair for a while, alone, reeling from that conversation. It made him feel almost as awful as when Hannibal suggested he kill someone. Almost.

The difference being, Wally wanted Will to kill someone for revenge, whereas Hannibal wanted Will to kill someone because he knew that it was something Will also wanted, deep down.

The beast scratched against Will's ribcage, anxious to be free.

But Will was tired of being anxious. He would rather be angry, and give credit where credit is due.

"His team playing?" Jack asked when Will walked out of the waiting room and into the hallway.

"He read about me in a Freddie Lounds article," Will scowled. "I had to justify myself to an 11-year old."

Jack studied him. "Resentment's raising a blister in you, Will."

Will hummed in agreement. The last time he'd been so resentful it was directed at Hannibal, after the man had betrayed him, framed him for serial murder, and landed him in prison.

This time, it was directed at Hannibal again. Will supposed that should come as no surprise; only Hannibal could infuriate Will to this degree. Will wanted to repay him by giving him a good bashing to the face.

"You think you might lose me after this, Jack?" Will wondered, changing the focus from himself to Jack. "You think I might go back to my family?"

Was Jack worried that he would get so anxious that he would quit, and go protect Molly and Walter at home? That this event would shake him so much that he'd run from the fight?

Will wasn't that man anymore. He hadn't been that man in a very long time.

“For a minute I did,” Jack admitted.

“Then you realized what I realized,” Will exhaled in frustration. “Which is I can’t go home, neither can Molly or Walter; not until the Red Dragon is out of the way.”

Then Will walked away from Jack and tersely asked the nurses what room his wife was in. They told him, and on the walk there Will tried to pull himself together. Molly didn’t deserve the brunt of his anger.

When he walked through the sliding glass doors to see her laying there, bandages covering her torso and breathing tube in her mouth, Will blinked. His quick eyes assessed her injuries: a shoulder wound, possible punctured lung. He did so clinically, with no emotions attached.

It had been a long day. As Will sat by Molly’s bedside, his emotional exhaustion gave way, once again, to anger.

He was tired of Hannibal doing whatever he wanted to Will’s life, like it belonged to him.

Hannibal picked up the phone from the dropbox as it was offered to him by Alana. She and Jack had been a bit slow to figure out that the Dragon was contacting him by pretending to be his lawyer, and it had been fun to poke at their incompetence.

It was going to be equally fun to put on a show for them, now.

They wanted him to coax the Dragon out into the open, and Alana had made it quite clear what would happen to Hannibal's privileges if he refused. Hannibal considered their offer, and accepted. If only because he liked to try new things, in order to see what would happen.

Curiosity had long been one of his most prevailing drives.

“Hello?” Hannibal greeted.

He was met only with sobs.

Glancing at Alana and Jack, who were listening from the nearby table, he picked up on their sudden anxiety. Nothing was more dangerous than a serial killer in pain, with no healthy way to process or cope with his emotions. They knew that and were afraid, whereas Hannibal knew the same and smiled in delight.

“You are the Dragon, you don’t have to be afraid. You know who speaks.” Hannibal paused. “From the beginning, you and the Dragon had been one. You are *becoming,* and the Dragon is your higher self.”

Hannibal still ached to see what Will’s higher self would be like. He had been so close once, but certain circumstances, and ill-fated choices, made Will’s becoming stop. Hannibal could no longer control Will, or manipulate him to any mentionable degree, but he still did his best to push Will towards that higher state of being.

The Dragon’s sobbing turned his focus back to the present.

“If I’m not as strong as the Dragon, she will die,” the killer worried.

“Don’t let fear leach your strength,” Hannibal warned quietly.

“I need to think… I need to think,” the Dragon repeated. “I… told her... I can’t be with her.”

Hannibal really had no interest in the Dragon’s relationship drama, but he’d had years of offering replies and advice to people in similar circumstances. He was not new to manipulating people through their emotions. But to what end would Hannibal do so?

It was fun, not quite knowing what he was going to do next. There were options, all of which he'd thought extensively about the consequences. But he'd yet to choose a path to take. He supposed he was waiting for the right moment to decide.

"You are almost blind to your own true feelings," Hannibal noted. "No more able to express them than a scar can blush. Do you know how you feel about her?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I am afraid she will come to the h-house to talk. I don't know w-what will happen in the house."

The sobbing started again.

"The Dragon may come down. I know how easily she would tear," he continued, gasping. "I think about what the Dragon would do to me if I don't… serve her up..."

Hannibal watched Jack and Alana's horrified expressions across the rooms, and remained silent. Silence was a great therapeutic tool, after all.

"She called me a man," the Dragon said, more collected this time. "A sweet man. But… I didn't hear… Reba's heart…"

Hannibal was having a good time letting the Dragon talk and freak out Bedelia and Jack, but he knew a way that he could be having more fun. It was a gamble; something he'd suffer consequences for, but with any luck it would be something that would pay off wonderfully.

"They're listening," Hannibal said simply, then hung up the phone.

The next night found Will at the hospital again, freshly changed and clothed. He'd taken Wally for some food, a shower, and new clothes as well, which he figured was the least he could do in terms of stepdad-who-got-mom-shot duties.

Will sighed in relief when he walked into Molly's hospital room that night and saw that they had taken the breathing tube out, and put her in a gown. It was a good sign, and he wasted no time in telling Wally that his mom was going to be fine.

The kid nodded in relief, but his eyes lingered a while on Will before turning back to baseball, like he was conveying a message.

Will knew exactly what he was trying to say.

You should kill him.

He took those thoughts into Molly's hospital room, sitting at her bedside and becoming familiar again with the beast inside his chest, until he heard the heart monitor beside him increase in frequency.

Looking up, he was glad to see Molly awake and gazing back at him.

"Wally's safe," Will said first, since that was the most important thing a mother could hear.

She gave a quick flash of a smile in relief, before her expression turned to displeasure.

"The dogs are safe," he added. "We're picking them up and bringing them in."

"You look different," she said, studying him.

Will imagined he did. He felt different. He felt more himself than he had in the last three years, and that was a difference.

"You said you wouldn't be the same when you came home," she remembered.

Will nodded. "You said you would."

Molly made a noise. "Boy, was I wrong about that."

She looked away from him and stared at the ceiling.

"I wanted you to go," she said. "I *told* you to go. Nobody to blame but myself." She laughed tonelessly. "And Jack Crawford. I do blame Jack Crawford."

Will lowered his head in shame. It wasn't anybody's fault that he went back except his own.

As Bedelia said, he just missed Hannibal that much. When the opportunity presented itself, no matter how hard Will tried to avoid it, he just couldn't resist.

"Jack knew what he was doing," Will replied after a beat. "So did I."

Molly looked at him again. "Is he after you now? Is that why he came after us?"

Will slid his eyes away from her gaze for a moment, before forcing himself to look at her again.

"He came after you because Hannibal suggested it," he said, unable to lie or keep the frustration out of his voice. "He urged him to do it."

Molly turned her face away again, but not before Will caught a spark of anger in her eyes.

"It's a clammy, sick feeling," she scowled.

"Yeah, I know it is," Will murmured, lowering his head.

"Wally almost died," Molly said, voice hard and loud. "My son almost died. I almost died." She let out a short laugh. "I knew it was him. I *knew* it was him, I saw your picture in that paper and I knew it was him."

Will felt his stomach drop out from under him.

Molly knew about his past. Walter had shown her that damned Tattlecrime article and she'd learned about what he had done, and how close he was to Hannibal. She knew everything.

The peace that Will had built with Molly out of blissful ignorance was no more. He could feel it shattering, right in that hospital room, into small little pieces.

He couldn't say anything, because there was nothing to say. It wasn't a misunderstanding, and there were no excuses for his behavior. His past, or rather who he truly was, seemed to be something he was unable to escape any longer.

Then Molly exhaled, long and deep.

"Hell, I got mad there for a second."

She laughed a little, more natural than her last one. The sound of it did nothing to make Will feel any better, although he joined in automatically.

When she stopped, Will stopped too, and words came spilling out of him, too strong to be held back any longer.

“I hate this, Molly,” he gasped. “I’m sorry.”

She nodded. “This could take a while.”

“It might,” Will said miserably.

“We’ll be back home, won’t we?” Molly asked, turning to smile at him.

Will couldn’t bring himself to smile back.

“Yep,” was all he managed to choke out.

She studied him again, then sighed. “It’s tough to hold onto anything good. It’s all so slippery.”

Will avoided her eyes. He felt like he already lost this good thing. At the very least, it was irrevocably changed. Will wasn’t sure if he’d be able to take it, if the only good thing in his life that had sustained him in the past three years was corrupted beyond repair.

He wasn’t sure what he’d do, if he was plunged into the abyss again.

“Slick as hell,” Will whispered.

After Molly fell asleep again, Will left Walter with one of the on-duty FBI handlers and drove back to Baltimore. Molly would be discharged soon, and she'd be able to take care of him better than Will ever could.

He barely paused to sign into the visitor's desk at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, he was so focused on getting to Hannibal and giving him a piece of his mind.

When he walked into his cell, Hannibal walked up as well, and Will prickled with the sudden image of a mirror separating them instead of glass. But then he got right up to the clear glass, close enough to glare at the thin scar on Hannibal's cheek.

"I'm just about worn out with you crazy sons of bitches," Will growled.

Hannibal grinned. "The essence of the worst in the human spirit is not found in the crazy sons of bitches. Ugliness is found in the faces of the crowd."

Will huffed. Leave it to Hannibal to spin an insult into a philosophical lesson.

"What did you say to him?" Will asked in a tightly controlled voice.

Hannibal looked into his eyes. Will did not look away.

"Save yourself, kill them all," he recalled. "Then I gave him your home address."

Will was so angry for a moment that he couldn't speak. Jack was right; resentment was chafing him like a bad blister, and if he wasn't careful then it would burst.

"How's the wife?" Hannibal inquired.

“How’s my *wife?”* Will spat. “She’s lucky.”

Hannibal mulled this over. “She survived the Great Red Dragon. Takes a pinch more than luck.”

Will could feel himself lose his anger the longer he looked in Hannibal’s eyes, and hated himself for it.

He knew why Hannibal sent the Dragon after Molly and Walter. He couldn’t exactly fault the man for lashing out his betrayed feelings in the only way that was available to him. Jealousy was ugly, but it denoted underlying affection.

Will was angry at Hannibal, but he was also angry at himself for how easy it was for him to understand Hannibal, to *forgive* him. It wasn’t a conscious decision, it never had been, and to Will that was the worst. Like he had no conscious control over his feelings when Hannibal was involved.

He hadn’t felt like this in three years, and he was scared of the fact that it was happening again. He’d married Molly to gain a sense of stability and distance himself from Hannibal, but after what happened that was all in shambles.

“When you look at her now, what do you see?” Hannibal asked.

“You know what I see,” Will whispered.

And he did. Hannibal knew Will better than anyone else, alive or dead. He knew the things Will saw behind his eyes at night, and the sights he imagined when he looked at his wife and stepson. Will couldn’t even spare the energy to pretend otherwise.

Then Hannibal changed the subject, apparently deciding that the Dragon was more interesting to discuss than Molly.

“Before he became the Red Dragon, this shy boy would never have dared any of this,” Hannibal mused.

“Well, now he thinks he can do anything,” Will accused. *“Anything.”*

Hannibal kept his gaze on Will. “The Dragon likely thinks *you* are as much a monster as you think he is.”

Will furrowed his brow. “Is this a competition?”

Something trickled down his spine from how intently Hannibal was staring at him now.

“Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast, and one is striving to forsake its brother,” Hannibal said.

Will’s frown deepened. It was a quote from Faust.

“The Great Red Dragon is freedom to him; shedding his skin, the sound of his voice, his own reflection,” Hannibal explained. “The building of a new body and the othering of himself, the splitting of his personality, all seem active and deliberate. He craves change.”

Will opened his mouth in understanding. “He didn’t murder those families? He *changed* them?”

This entire conversation, their eyes had never left each other’s. Will’s anger had faded, as had Hannibal’s pride, until both of them were left before each other, looking into each other’s eyes with the many barriers between them fading away.

When Hannibal next spoke, it was quiet and vulnerable, filling Will with an emotion he preferred to leave unnamed.

“Don’t you crave change, Will?”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter coming soon!!

The Number of the Beast is 666

Chapter Summary

Will felt like he got slapped in the face.

“But do you ache for him?” Bedelia drawled.

Chapter Notes

I really like this chapter because of the "Is Hannibal in love with me" scene, hope you do too! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Hannibal asked Will that million dollar question, he walked out of the BSHCI, drove back to his motel room, fed his new dog, and went to bed. Sleep came easy for once, but Will figured it was only because he was emotionally and physically exhausted.

He couldn’t go back up to Maine, to Molly’s hospital room. Not when she and Wally were still in danger, not when the Dragon was out there. He had a job to do, the job that he’d returned to Quantico to accomplish. To stop the Great Red Dragon.

He couldn’t go back home until that happened. He wasn’t sure if he could, even if it did happen.

But he didn’t want to think about the future now, it was all suddenly too much like a black hole. So Will focused on what he could do, and that was profiling the Dragon in order to catch him.

The next day he told Jack of the insight he gained from Hannibal last night, about the Dragon being focused more on change than on destruction. He left Hannibal’s parting words out,

where he asked Will if he craved change.

He was still thinking about it.

Not finding the energy within him to see Hannibal, Will went to see the only other person that could possibly help ease him into the Dragon's mindset, through Hannibal's. If she didn't manage to poke Will's mindset full of holes first.

Bedelia sat as straight and elegant as ever in her usual chair, staring at Will with that familiar condescending look as she waited for him to begin.

Might as well get it over with, Will thought to himself.

"I look at my wife and I see her dead," he shared. "I see Mrs. Leeds and Mrs. Jacobi lying where Molly should be."

In his mind, it made sense to lump Molly in with the victims of the Dragon. She escaped him, but that wasn't the point. The point was that he went after her, that she was *supposed* to be dead.

Bedelia nodded slowly. "Do you see yourself killing her?"

Will disliked the answer, was even haunted by it at times; but at this point, after years of empathizing with killers, it didn't really surprise him.

"Yes," he murmured. "Over and over."

Bedelia didn't seem surprised either.

“It’s hard to predict when brittle materials will break,” she mused.

Will chafed at being labeled as brittle, but he knew she was right. He’d always been unstable, as Jack called it. Or *malleable*, as Chiyoh said. It was the thing that truly terrified him, that it wouldn’t take much for his fragile control to snap and to let his instincts and true desires take over.

“Hannibal gave you three years to build a family,” Bedelia observed. “Confident that he would find a way to take them from you.”

“And he has,” Will exhaled.

He knew that. What he had with Molly, that fragile peace maintained by careful ignorance, came crashing down the moment she learned about Will’s past and her son almost died.

He wouldn’t be able to return to them anymore, not after that. He couldn’t show his face to them.

Will wasn’t as upset about it as he expected. He lost a safe haven, but deep down he’d always known that it had an expiration date. Something that good just wasn’t meant for him. He changed his shape in order to fit into their puzzle, but eventually his natural state would reveal itself and no longer be able to fit in.

“What’s he going to take from you?” Will wondered, reminding Bedelia that he wasn’t the only one in danger in this situation.

She looked amused. “Is it important to you that he take something from me?”

Will thought about it. He thought about all that Bedelia had done — taken Will’s place in Italy, been so close to Hannibal without getting scarred or wounded, and taken every opportunity she had to remind Will of it.

He decided that it was important to him for her to lose something to Hannibal, but if he had the chance, he'd want to take something from her himself.

"Hannibal has agency in the world," Will said slowly, a thinly-veiled threat.

"Hannibal has no intention of seeing me dead by any other hand than his own," Bedelia replied, unbothered. "And only then, if he can eat me."

Will liked the sound of that.

"He's in no position to eat me now," she finished.

Will wanted to smile. She shouldn't be so confident that those circumstances wouldn't change.

"If you play," Will said lowly, "you pay."

Bedelia smiled softly. "You have paid dearly. It excites him, to know that you are marked in this way."

Will rolled his eyes. "Why?"

"Why do you think?" Bedelia shot back.

"Bluebeard's wife," Will sneered, remembering the old story. Bedelia scoffed. "Secrets you're not to know, but sworn to keep."

Bedelia looked slightly annoyed now, to Will's joint satisfaction and confusion.

"If I'm to be Bluebeard's wife," she responded, "I would have preferred to be the last."

Will frowned as he searched Bedelia's tight face, understanding the implications of her statement but not quite getting the meaning. If Hannibal was Bluebeard in this metaphor, and if Bedelia was implying that Will was his next wife, after her…

Suddenly, everything that Bedelia had said to him about Hannibal floated through his mind.

We've both been his bride.

My relationship with Hannibal is not as passionate as yours. You are here visiting an old flame.

Is your wife aware of how intimately you and Hannibal know each other?

"Is Hannibal…" Will could not quite believe how easily the words were forming on his tongue. "... *in love* with me?"

"Could he, daily, feel a stab of hunger for you? Only to find nourishment at the very sight of you?" Bedelia asked.

She was quoting a poem from Dante. *La Vita Nuova.*

"Yes," Bedelia answered, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Will felt like he got slapped in the face.

“But do you ache for him?” Bedelia drawled.

Will’s mind was spinning, the room he was sitting in with Bedelia faded away, and suddenly every moment he’d ever had with Hannibal was flashing in front of his eyes.

The way he had looked at Will during their first meeting, like he was some magnificent, rare treasure. A look that never faded away, and had instead shown up again and again in their interactions with astounding frequency.

Next time it showed up it had been after Tobias Budge almost killed them both. Will had walked into Hannibal’s office, and Hannibal, with his face bloodied and body aching, had looked up at Will in what felt like relief. Will had been relieved then, too.

There was the time Hannibal had made fancy chicken soup for Will when he was in the hospital, although it was his fault Will was in there. After Will found out the truth about his encephalitis he was angry, but that anger had not quite overtaken the soft gratitude and warmth inside him as he thought of the memory. Nobody had ever really taken care of him while he was sick.

And then later on, after Will had gotten out of the BSHCI, Hannibal had kept his standing appointment open. Will had been surprised about that at the time, but now…

He remembered how Hannibal had stopped him from shooting Clark Ingram in that barn. How he’d taken the gun, murmured praises, then cupped Will’s neck and brought their faces close together, so close that Will had thought for a moment, a very brief moment, that Hannibal might kiss him.

He thought about how gently Hannibal had taken his hands after he killed Randall Tier. He’d touched Will with reverence, and washed the blood from his hands like he was a disciple washing the feet of Christ.

He recalled the hope in Hannibal's hazel eyes when they had prepared to run away together, and then the utter pain and betrayal in those same eyes when he'd caressed Will's face, wet from tears and the rain, and stabbed him. Exactly in the right place, so that Will would survive.

Will remembered how Hannibal had looked down at him, clutching his bloody wound on the kitchen floor. The way Hannibal had spoken, and the expression on his face… He was *heartbroken* .

And then later, after they'd both had time to recover, Will followed Hannibal to Italy, his first stop the Norman Chapel in Palermo. He could still feel the imaginary rawness of Hannibal's man-made valentine beneath his hand, his token of love made exclusively for Will.

His broken heart.

Your il Mostro, Inspector Pazzi had called Hannibal. Will now realized he was right.

Florence had been a beautiful city, but the way Hannibal had looked at Will when he sat down on that bench next to him, in front of *la Primavera* in the Uffizi gallery, was truly something else. Although that Botticelli was Hannibal's favorite painting, he had chosen to look at Will instead.

He remembered how the fresh bruises and cuts on Hannibal's face had done nothing to dim his bright smile, or contain his awed words.

If I saw you everyday, forever, Will, I would remember this time.

You're beautiful, Will now knew he was saying.

Then they were taken by Mason Verger, tied up and strapped down like pigs but allowed a nice suit to attend dinner. Will remembered feeling a rush of anger and defiance as he'd

surged forward to bite a chunk off of Cordell's face, but the clearest part of the memory was how Hannibal had looked at him afterwards.

He looked at Will like he hung the very stars in the sky. Like he was the best thing he'd ever seen, like Will was the very air he breathed.

Another memory flashed across Will's vision, this one set in the snow outside Will's old house in Wolf Trap in the middle of the night. He saw Hannibal kneeling in the snow, giving himself up. All the fight having left him, or rather nothing left to fight *for,* because of what Will had said to him.

I want you to know exactly where I am, and where you can always find me.

Hannibal went to prison for him. Hannibal considered Will his family. Hannibal starting living his life revolved around Will, instead of it being revolved around only himself.

Hannibal *loved* him.

All of a sudden, Will couldn't breathe.

"I have to go," he choked to Bedelia, jumping out of his seat and rushing out of her house before she could say anything.

He had his car keys in his hand, then in the ignition, before his mind consciously caught up to his movements. On full autopilot, Will left Bedelia's house and started driving down the interstate.

He only got about 5 miles down the road before he had to pull off to the side, throw the car into park, and bury his face in his hands.

Hannibal was in love with him. Hannibal Lecter, the cannibalistic serial killer, was *in love with him.*

Don't act so surprised, Will's mind chided. *You knew this.*

And he supposed he did. Deep down, he knew. He caught those looks, those actions, those loving words. But there was a big difference, at least to Will Graham, between knowing something intrinsically and consciously acknowledging it.

Besides, it was easy to think it wasn't really true when he thought of himself as unlovable. It couldn't be true, because how could anyone love the real Will Graham? Nobody did. Certainly not Molly.

But it seemed like Hannibal Lecter, by some miracle, did.

He focused on his breathing, clutched at his hair, and eventually the pure feeling of being overwhelmed passed.

He exhaled slowly as he leaned back to rest his head against his seat, and heard Bedelia's words whisper in his ear.

But do you ache for him?

Will was unsure. He'd never really been in love before. He'd had crushes, and had a deep appreciation and compassion for Molly, but he wasn't convinced he'd ever felt *love*, not in the same way Hannibal apparently felt for him.

But every time he was in the same room as Hannibal, and every time he thought about him, something in his chest *ached.*

It ached in the way that reminded Will of getting stabbed, or shot. It was a sudden, piercing, all-consuming feeling that threatened to suffocate him. It was like there was a wild animal trapped in his chest, the very beast he feared, scratching against the bone of his ribs. Trying to break free to meet its mate.

Will didn't want to think about it, but he couldn't ignore it. The natural next step after finding out someone loved him was wondering if he loved them back.

He felt many things for Hannibal. It was hard for him to draw clear lines in that mess of feelings and try to categorize any of it, let alone label one feeling as love. Will decided that he didn't really know the answer. Not yet.

He took another deep breath, and gripped the steering wheel again.

This changed nothing. Hannibal was still in prison, and the Dragon still wasn't. He needed to focus on changing those circumstances.

Just the Dragon's circumstances. Not Hannibal's. Right.

Will was an adult. He could handle this. He could handle his former best friend/psychiatrist/cannibalistic serial killer being in love with him. It was fine.

He wasn't so sure if he could handle it if he discovered that he loved Hannibal back, but that was another problem for another day.

Right now, Will took another breath, shoved all his feelings down like he'd been doing for years, and pulled his car back onto the road.

Duty called.

Hannibal was happy to receive Jack Crawford as his first visitor of the day. He'd hoped it would be Will — he always hoped for Will — but Jack was an adequate consolation prize. Especially since he obviously came here to discuss Will.

"Will's thoughts are no more bound by fear or kindness than Milton's were by physics," Hannibal shared with shielded excitement. "He is both free and damned to imagine anything."

Hannibal's plan was working out perfectly. By siccing the Dragon on Will's family, he succeeded in tainting them. Although he would've preferred to take them away from Will physically, he could settle for removing them psychologically. It was clear that he succeeded, but how upset and gaunt Will had seemed during his visit yesterday.

It would only be a matter of time before the rest of Will's tethers disintegrated, leaving him completely free to act however he chose. Hannibal could hardly wait.

"Now that he's imagined the worse," Jack supplied, always in disapproval.

Hannibal smiled. "Like ducklings, we imprint on those ideas that grab our attention."

Hannibal knew Will well enough to know that his attention had been grabbed by visions of blood and death for years. It was wonderful.

"What's got your attention, doctor?" Jack asked suspiciously. "God, the Devil, and the Great Red Dragon?"

Hannibal inclined his head. "Lest we forget the Lamb."

Jack stared at him.

“Will is the Lamb of God?” he said skeptically.

“*Hide us from the Wrath of the Lamb*,” Hannibal said, quoting one of his favorite bible verses.

Jack made a face of displeasure. “Who’s “us”?”

“You, me, and the Great Red Dragon,” Hannibal answered mildly.

They all would surely face Will’s wrath. Although Hannibal had no intention to hide from it.

“The Lamb’s wrath touched everyone who errs,” Hannibal continued. “His retribution is even more deadly than the Dragon’s.”

“It is,” Jack acknowledged. “For you.”

Hannibal smiled wider.

“The seals are being opened, Jack. The lamb is becoming a lion.” He tilted his head. “*For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”*

Will had been stewing in anxiety and annoyance all day, and seeing Freddie Lounds and Frederick Chilton in the same room just amplified those feelings.

Him, Jack, and Alana had come up with this flimsy plan simply because they didn’t have anything else to go on. Will, as always, was to be the bait. Dragon bait.

He didn't really mind. For once, it was an operation that might very well go down according to plan, with FBI reinforcements on hand to protect Will if the Dragon threatened harm. Which he most certainly would, after this offensive article came out.

But as Will paced the room and landed his eyes on Frederick Chilton, his mind started formulating a new plan.

"The Tooth Fairy's actions indicate a projective delusion compensating for intolerable feelings of inadequacy," Chilton was saying. "Smashing mirrors ties these feelings to his appearance."

"Not only is the Tooth Fairy insane, he is ugly and impotent," Will embellished.

Chilton paused for a moment before continuing.

"There is a strong bonding of aggressive and sexual drives that occurs in sadists at an early age," he explained.

"He's a vicious, perverted, sexual failure," Will cut in. "An animal."

He had to hold back a smile. This was fun, and greatly diminishing his negative feelings from earlier. He'd bad-mouthed people before, but this was on a whole different level.

Chilton shot him an unsettled look. Will raised an eyebrow.

He looked away. "The savage acts aimed primarily at the women and performed in the presence of families are clearly strikes at a maternal figure."

"The Tooth Fairy is the product of an incestuous home," Will proclaimed.

Chilton chewed his lip.

“This is the child of a nightmare,” he finished.

Will looked at him in slight surprise. He’d never considered having compassion for the Dragon, to view him as an abused child.

Not like how he’d been able to see Hannibal in that light, after visiting his home in Lithuania a few years ago.

“Will, I think we need a key shot of you here in your “Washington hideaway”,” Jack called, pulling him out of his memories.

Freddie got up. “I’d love something of you in a bathrobe, sitting at a desk, poring over this artist’s conception of the Fairy.”

She pulled out a poorly drawn sketch that looked more like Frankenstein’s monster than anything else, and Will wanted to laugh in her face.

“I’ll stand by the window,” he said instead. “And make sure you can see the fountain and the Capitol dome. The Red Dragon needs to be able to find this place… if he wants to.”

If he wants to, being the key phrase. As Will positioned himself in front of the window, he had an idea that might introduce a bit of conflict into the Dragon’s desires.

“Frederick, would you like to be in the photograph?” Will invited.

He knew the implications of what he was offering, but he felt nothing except a flash of curiosity over how his calculated addition would change their carefully constructed plan. He was still thinking about the fact that Hannibal was in love with him, and what that said about

the kind of person he was. Hannibal couldn't love someone innocent, so maybe Will should see how dark he really was.

It was a small thing, really, adding Chilton to the picture. But as Will put his hand on the man's shoulder, he had the strange feeling like he was marking him for death.

He felt a small thrill at the thought, and that confirmed what he knew all along. That he was exactly the monster that Hannibal thought he was.

He did not smile for the picture.

Hannibal smiled as Jack read the note he'd received from the Red Dragon, along with his thoughtful gift. *With these he offended me.*

"Dr. Chilton often offended me, so I certainly understand the sentiment," Hannibal interjected.

He was strapped down to the standing gurney again, albeit without the face mask this time. The position reminded him of being restrained by Mason Verger three years ago on his farm, and he thought it was fitting that Alana Verger-Bloom confined him in the same way whenever he did something naughty.

He couldn't quite bring himself to regret it, though.

Jack held out the evidence plate that contained Frederick Chilton's bottom lip.

"Where's the other one?" he ground out.

Hannibal smiled, fondly remembering how it tasted. Frederick had always been on his menu, as it were, and it was nice to finally get a taste.

“This one can provide you anything the other one can,” he replied, smirking.

He glanced at Alana, who seemingly didn’t want to admit that she’d allowed Hannibal a taste of human flesh under her watch, then back at Jack again.

“I’m sorry, Jack,” Hannibal laughed. “The tragedy of what’s happened to Frederick has put me in an excellent humor.”

Hannibal thought that perhaps he felt better today than he’d felt in his entire prison sentence. He didn’t know all the details about what happened to Frederick, but he was a regular subscriber to Ms. Lounds’s Tattlecrime magazine, even in his captivity. He’d read the article about Chilton and Will talking about the Dragon yesterday, and knew that his favorite empath had something to do with it.

It was clear after reading the article that their intentions had been to set a trap for the Dragon, using Will as bait. But after Frederick’s lips were sent to him, it was abundantly clear that their plan had failed.

Thinking back to the picture attached to yesterday’s article, Hannibal was certain he knew why. And it pleased him immensely.

He couldn’t wait to see what happened next. He hoped that Will visited soon, so that he could congratulate him on a job well done.

And encourage him to do more.

Will's heart beat fast as he watched the film play out in Jack's office, unable to look away.

"Because I was forced to lie, he will be more merciful to me than to you, Will Graham," Chilton said slowly, making sure to get the words correct on command.

He was shirtless and his arms were angled slightly behind his back, indicating that he was restrained in some way. A captive of the Great Red Dragon.

"Reach behind you and feel the small knobs on the top of your pelvis," Frederick's brows furrowed slightly, before his eyes opened wide in fear at what he had to say next. "Feel your spine between them. That is the precise spot where the Dragon will snap your spine."

Will's heart pumped faster in his chest, fear starting to mix with the adrenaline of watching the film. A thrill went through him, but he ignored it.

"There is much for you to dread," Chilton relayed. "From my own lips, you will learn a little more to dread."

And then the back of the Dragon came on screen, and ripped Chilton's lips off with his teeth.

Will's heart pounded out of control, his breath hitched, and his ears rang. Weakly, he lowered himself into a nearby chair and brought his hands up to block out the sound of Chilton screaming.

His manipulation of the plan resulted in the predicted effect: Chilton became a victim of the Dragon. His escalated physical reaction to that information was a product of his empathy. Hearing Chilton's screams made Will feel his agony and horror, so severely that he couldn't block it out right away.

But after Jack turned the film off, and the awful sounds faded away into silence, the mindset of Frederick Chilton left Will and something different took its place. Something natural, and something dark.

He felt a rush of power over his ability to make something like this come to pass.

The briefing with Jack and Alana passed with Will barely engaged. There was nothing really to say, anyway. Just a lot of grave expressions to give, and receive.

He drove to Bedelia's house as soon as he was able to.

"Would you like to talk about what happened with Frederick Chilton?" she asked as they took their respective seats across from each other.

Will leaned forward and squeezed his hands together.

"The divine punishment of a sinner mirrors the sin being punished," he said.

Bedelia nodded. *"Contrapasso.* You play, you pay."

Will inclined his head and sat up straight. Chilton had played, and paid. Will's little push forward just expedited the process.

"Chilton languished unrecognized until *Hannibal the Cannibal,"* Will stated. "He wanted the world to know his face."

"And now he doesn't have one, "Bedelia drawled.

Chilton's sin was greed, and his divine punishment took it all away from him.

"Damned if I'll feel," Will huffed. He refused to feel sorry for Chilton.

Bedelia studied him.

“We are all making our way through the Inferno,” she said softly. “Dante’s pilgrims.”

“No, we’re not pilgrims. We’re pets,” Will corrected. “And the Great Red Dragon kills pets first.”

Bedelia’s eyes narrowed. “You put your hand on Dr. Chilton’s shoulder in the photograph.”

Will nodded to himself. Just like he was petting a dog.

“Touch gives the world an emotional context,” Bedelia continued. “The touch of others makes us who we are. It builds trust.”

Will gave a small smile. “I put my hand on his shoulder for authenticity.”

Bedelia was not convinced.

“To establish that he really told you those insults about the Dragon?” She tilted her head. “Or maybe you wanted to put Dr. Chilton at risk? Just a little?”

Will hummed. “I wonder.”

“Do you have to wonder?” Bedelia pressed.

Will looked at her, eyes hard.

“No.”

Bedelia nodded slowly.

“What did you think the Great Red Dragon would do?” she inquired. “You were curious what would happen, that’s apparent.”

Will blinked. He said that same phrase once, in reference to Hannibal. They really were alike, more alike than Will let himself admit in the past.

“Is this what you were expecting?” Bedelia asked.

Will shrugged. “I can’t say I’m surprised.”

“Then you may as well have struck the match,” she retorted. “That’s participation.”

They stared at each other for a moment.

“Hannibal Lecter does have agency in the world,” Bedelia mused. “He has you.”

This time, when that thrill went through him, Will embraced it and called it what it was.

Pride.

Chapter End Notes

The Wrath of the Lamb is next!! I'll probably end up splitting it into two chapters because I know it'll be long haha

The Wrath of the Lamb Part 1

Chapter Summary

> And then Hannibal spoke again, and Will's walls crumbled.
>
> "What a cunning boy you are," he murmured, voice tinged with pride and a smidge of something else, something that Will refused to acknowledge.

Chapter Notes

> It's here!!!! Will has some realizations this chapter ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The Dragon's dead," Jack relayed, voice tinny on the phone. "His name was Francis Dolarhyde."

Will blinked and sat up on his motel bed. He hadn't expected it to be that easy, especially not after what happened with Chilton.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"Suicide," Jack answered grimly. "Tried to make it a murder-suicide too, but Reba McClane escaped before the fire Dolarhyde set could consume her."

Will processed this slowly. He couldn't believe it was really over. Cases of this caliber usually… didn't end so easily.

Well. He supposed this one *didn't* end easily, at least not for Dr. Chilton. Or Reba McClane, he wagered.

"Thanks for all your help, Will," Jack said. "I could use your help on a few more cases, if you want to have a look — "

"What hospital is Reba McClane at?" Will interrupted.

Jack sighed, then told him. Will hung up, uninterested in being pressured to rejoin Jack Crawford's crime-fighting efforts. That wasn't truly why he came back in the first place, and he was tired of being used.

He was done with Jack, but he still had some loose ends to tie up. As well as he could, anyway.

Will grabbed his coat, petted the dog goodbye, then drove straight to the hospital.

"He shot himself in the face."

It was the first thing Reba said to Will after he introduced himself. Will was neither surprised nor disturbed by it. He'd heard, and seen, much worse.

"I put my hand in it," she continued, voice wavering. "He set fire to the house… He *shot* himself… I put my hand in it…"

She trailed off, muttering what Dolarhyde had done over and over again.

Will sat at her bedside and felt a twinge of sympathy. This woman didn't deserve what happened to her.

Will got up and put a firm hand on her shoulder, which seemed to ground her in place. She stopped muttering, and tears were no longer leaking out of her blind eyes.

"I won't put you through this again," Will said, "but I'd like to come back by. Just to say hi, and see how you're doing."

He picked up his coat, getting ready to leave her alone. He knew how important it was to leave someone to process their trauma in peace. His presence would only be more stressful to her. He'd just come to see the woman who had gotten so close to the Dragon and survived.

His offer made Reba smile weakly.

"How could you help it?" she said with faint humor. "A charmer like me."

Will studied her. Being alone might be a blessing for some people, but this woman still looked unstable. If anyone could say anything that would be even remotely helpful to her, it would be Will.

He set his coat down on the end of her bed and took her hand.

"In the end…" Will said softly. "He couldn't kill you, and he couldn't watch you die."

Reba's lips trembled.

"People who study this kind of thing say that he was trying to stop, because you helped him," Will told her. "Probably saved some lives."

He didn't really know what he was doing. He was trying to help, because Reba was a victim. Will supposed that he felt a sort of kinship with her, as people who were unknowing victims of serial killers.

Will could remember what that felt like, although it had been years since he had been either a victim, or unknowing.

But Reba didn't seem comforted by his words.

"I drew a freak," she said, self-loathing evident.

Will closed his eyes and shook his head. It wasn't right to label Dolarhyde, or any killer for that matter, simply as a freak or a psychopath. They were just as human and complex as everyone else, no matter how twisted.

"You didn't draw a freak. You drew a man," Will amended quietly, "with a freak on his back."

He swallowed, and said the words he'd long tried, and failed, to convince himself of.

"There is nothing wrong with you."

"I know there's nothing wrong with me," Reba responded without a thought. "In making friends, I try to be wary of people who foster dependency and feed on it. I've been with a few." She nodded. "The blind attract them."

Will gave a sad smile. "Not just the blind."

He left Reba after that, and drove straight to the other loose end in his life. But this one was so frayed, yet so strong, that Will doubted he would ever be able to be completely rid of it.

As he sat in the parking lot of the BSHCI, his car long turned off, Will realized something. This was the first time he'd come to see Hannibal after realizing that the man was in love

with him.

How was he going to stand in front of Hannibal and look him in the eye, knowing of his feelings?

Will had avoided the BSHCI after his session with Bedelia because he didn't think he'd be able to handle seeing Hannibal again without breaking down. He wasn't sure if he would be able to, even now.

But Will just couldn't leave without saying goodbye.

With a deep breath, Will got out of the car and walked inside the building on unsteady legs. Going through security and the stone hallways passed in a blur, and Will didn't feel his heart in his chest until it started to beat uncontrollably at the sight of the thick wood doors that led to Hannibal's cell.

Will didn't stop walking, because if he stopped he wasn't sure if he'd be able to start again.

He pushed the door open, and somehow it felt like pushing the gate of the Norman Chapel open instead. Wood melted into iron, and as Will walked inside Hannibal's cell the dull white walls and glass cage faded away into the bright colors and detailed mosaics of the *Cappella* that was close to Will's heart.

Just as it was close to Hannibal's.

In the BSHCI, Will walked up to the glass wall that separated them — but in the *Cappella,* he went straight up to where Hannibal was standing by the votive candles, where the only thing separating them was a few inches of air.

His heart was still pounding in his chest, and this close to Hannibal, Will couldn't stop thinking about that four letter word.

Love.

He felt like he was on the verge of falling apart, but he did his best to hold himself together. He would hate himself even more if he had an emotional breakdown at the BSHCI, in front of Alana's cameras and Hannibal's sharp, but somehow still gentle, gaze.

So, standing there in Hannibal's space, Will engaged in the best defense that he had.

"Ding dong, the Dragon's dead," he sassed.

He could feel Hannibal's eyes on him. The appraising look, the hopeful glance, all becoming obvious with the interested tilt of his head.

"Are congratulations in order?" Hannibal inquired.

"I didn't kill him," Will said, grateful to have the facts to hide behind. "Suicide."

Hannibal considered this. "Then he wasn't as strong as the Dragon after all."

Will blinked, no longer wanting to see the *Cappella de Normani* . It was getting to be too much, and he needed to focus. He needed to get this conversation over with, so that he could leave.

It was interesting that as much as he wanted to leave Hannibal's space, he also wanted to stay by his side just as much. Will would've felt trapped by that contradiction, but… he was starting to get used to incongruity. He didn't have to be one thing, or another. He could be both.

However, this awareness did nothing to subside his feelings of high anxiety, so Will walked from the center of Hannibal's cell to the right side, closer to him. Restless energy, needing somewhere safe to go.

"He was trying to stop," Will said, planting his feet on the ground so that he wouldn't start pacing.

Hannibal was leaning back against the ornate wall of his cell, and sighed at Will's approach.

"I was rooting for you, Will," he mused. "It's a shame. You came all this way, and you didn't get to kill anybody."

Will swallowed thickly at the words that knew just where to stab him in order to find the weak spot in his armor.

Hannibal turned his head to look at Will, a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips.

"Only consolation is Dr. Chilton," Hannibal continued. "Congratulations for the job you did on him. I admired it enormously."

He pushed himself off the wall and advanced towards the glass, towards Will. Will had expected Hannibal to bring this up — after all, how could he not? — so it was relatively easy to ignore Hannibal's bait.

Talking about Chilton — although what happened to him was a tragedy and Will was still half-scared of his part in it and reaction to it — was a hell of a lot easier to talk about with Hannibal than it was to talk about his feelings.

He may have asked Bedelia if Hannibal was in love with him, but he'd rather cut out his tongue than ask Hannibal directly. A conversation focused primarily on the feelings between them would be unbearable. It would untether Will to the last remnants of sanity he had left,

and he wouldn't be able to hold himself back from acting the way the beast inside him yearned to.

The beast represented the part of himself that wanted to kill. The part that hated seeing Hannibal incarcerated. The part that imagined Hannibal and himself, side by side and close together, covered in the blood of whatever enemy they'd disposed of and gazing at each other with fire in their eyes.

Will forcefully pushed the beast back inside his chest and quirked his eyebrow at Hannibal, once again using his attitude to distract himself from his inner conflict.

And then Hannibal spoke again, and Will's walls crumbled.

"What a cunning boy you are," he murmured, voice tinged with pride and a smidge of something else, something that Will refused to acknowledge.

A tidal wave of emotions was threatening to crash over Will after those words, but he did his best to fight it. If he ignored it, ignored it so hard that his head ached and his chest tightened, then maybe he could get out of this discussion unscathed.

"Are you accusing me of something?" he asked quietly, throat dry.

"Does the enemy inside you agree with the accusation?" Hannibal wondered. "Even a little bit?"

Of course it does, Will wanted to scream. *But I'm sure as hell not going to admit that to you.*

"I came back to stop the Dragon," Will said instead, defaulting to deflection. "He stopped."

Hannibal nodded.

“Your family was on his itinerary. Safe, now. You can go home again, if there’s any point.” His voice grew quiet, into a whisper. “Is there any point?”

They stared at each other, and then Will moved again, walking to the center of the cell. He wanted to get away from those eyes, absolutely shining with Hannibal’s feelings, his desire for Will to stay, his *love* for him .

But of course Hannibal followed him, behind the glass. Will supposed he would always follow him, if able. The thought made his heart ache again.

But do you ache for him? Bedelia’s voice whispered in his mind.

“I like my life there,” Will declared, the words holding less weight than he anticipated. He didn’t know if he was trying to convince Hannibal, or himself. Or both.

“It won’t be the same,” Hannibal said, making his own declaration. “You’ll see it’s not the same. The unspoken knowledge will live with you, like unwanted company in the house.”

Will did not want to talk about this anymore, he really did *not* want to talk to Hannibal about whether or not he would go home again. He already knew the low chance of that happening, he knew that Hannibal was right about it not being the same. But he was stubborn, and didn’t want to admit it to the man. He didn’t want Hannibal to feel as if he won.

He didn’t want to admit to himself that he was starting to lose his grip on morality.

“Molly and I want it to be the same,” Will said, raising his voice. He didn’t know if the statement was true or not. Truth and lies were beginning to mix.

Hannibal was quiet for a moment, the silence raising Will’s anxiety level. What was Hannibal thinking about so intently, what was he going to say?

“When life becomes maddingly polite…” Hannibal took a few steps forward, close enough until there was only a few inches between his face and the glass. “Think about me.”

Will supposed he wasn’t surprised at the request. Hannibal always wanted his attention. Still, he didn’t have to ask for it. He was on Will’s mind more often than not, which was why he needed the distraction of Molly and Walter to keep him occupied and prevent him from drowning in pain.

“Think about me, Will,” Hannibal whispered. “Don’t worry about me.”

Will’s eyes widened slightly and his heart thudded in his chest.

Now that he knew of Hannibal’s true feelings, he suddenly understood exactly what Hannibal was trying to say. He made the distinction between Will thinking of him and worrying about him, like each one had a different effect. Will supposed they did, but only slightly. Thinking about Hannibal hurt Will’s heart, but worrying about him set off his anxiety and threatened to consume him.

As Will thought about it more, he realized that he could think of Hannibal without experiencing extreme negative effects. It would be hard, of course, because he’d be drowning in memories and swimming in the pain of it all.

But worrying about Hannibal would be worse. Will would be hyper-focused on what Hannibal was doing at that moment, whether he was living comfortably, wondering about what books, paintings, and food he was allowed to consume, and thinking about how the rest of his life would be, living in a prison. Worrying about Hannibal in that way was what made the past three years especially difficult for Will. He wasn’t able to enjoy Hannibal being incarcerated and paying for his crimes because he was too busy worrying about his well-being.

Shit, Will thought at the insight. *What does that say about me?*

And Hannibal had known this difference. He'd known Will's thoughts, his feelings, his reactions. He was proving, once again, that he knew Will better than Will knew himself. With that knowledge, instead of manipulating Will like he might have at an earlier time, he decided to make a request.

Think about me, Will. Don't worry about me.

Hannibal didn't want him to worry. Hannibal didn't want him to spend his days in a haze of anxiety, his life held back by the cannibal serial killer in captivity. He wanted Will to live his life, free of worry.

If Will had any doubts about what Hannibal felt for him, they were all erased with that whispered request.

Hannibal wanted what was best for Will. Perhaps, that's all he ever wanted. All that talk of killing, of letting go, of being free — it wasn't because Hannibal wanted to manipulate Will into his image. It was because he truly thought that it would be what's best for Will.

Will knew, deep in his bones, that *that* was what love was.

At that moment, staring at Hannibal through the glass, his mind reeling, Will considered if Hannibal was right about what was best for him.

But then, it didn't matter. The Dragon was dead. Will didn't have an excuse to stay anymore. He was going to leave Hannibal, and his becoming, behind. Hannibal knew this too, which was why he asked him not to worry.

Will felt himself slipping into that emotional, vulnerable state that preceded breakdowns and got scared. He couldn't, under any circumstance, lose it in front of Hannibal. He'd already tried sass and deflection, so his desperate mind came up with one last defense.

Attack. The best defense was offense, after all.

He knew what he was going to say, but he didn't account for his body moving of its own accord towards the glass wall. Will was powerless to stop himself from reaching up and placing a hand against the glass, a small crack in his armor that indicated just how much his heart was bleeding.

The glass felt cool against his heated skin and he sighed, speaking the words he'd kept from Hannibal for three years.

"You turned yourself in so I would always know where you were," he murmured. "But you'd only do that, if I rejected you."

It was a simple statement, but Will could tell that Hannibal immediately understood the underlying meaning to his words. Many emotions passed through Hannibal's eyes as Will looked into them across the glass: comprehension, surprise, anger, pride, and sadness.

Will had succeeded in making Hannibal feel equally vulnerable as himself right now, all because he'd told the truth about what happened that day, after Muskrat Farm. It had been one of the rawest, most emotional conversations of Will's entire life, and he knew then, by seeing the glint of unshed tears in Hannibal's eyes, that it had been the same for him.

For Hannibal to find out now that Will had an alternative motive in the conversation that made Hannibal decide to surrender to the FBI was stunning. To find out that Will had finally succeeded in manipulating Hannibal into being caught was, understandably, a big revelation for the man.

Still, there was more than just surprise and anger in his eyes. There was genuine sadness, and a flash of pride.

Will wasn't expecting those, and it resulted in *him* being knocked off-balance too. He may have made Hannibal feel vulnerable, but he still felt overemotional. Way too much to be able to handle anything else, and there was only one thing left for Will to do.

“Goodbye,” he said, to the only person who’d ever truly loved him for him.

His hand fell off the glass as he stepped away, and in a few big strides Will was already out the doors and turning down the hallway.

“Will,” Hannibal called out, making him pause.

The big doors to Hannibal’s cell were still automatically open, so Will looked back and was able to see Hannibal standing there, right in front of the glass.

“Was it good to see me?” Hannibal asked.

“Good?” Will echoed, feeling out the word on his tongue.

Will didn’t know if he’d label it as *good.* Seeing Hannibal again had been devastating, in the best possible way. It had been what he needed, what he craved, what he couldn’t live without. It wasn’t *good.* It was *everything* , and he both hated and loved that.

“No,” Will responded, then turned and walked away.

He didn’t look back that time.

“Another round,” Will muttered, holding up his glass to the bartender. The woman eyed him but did as requested, and Will immediately shot the burning whiskey down his throat.

It wasn’t enough. It wasn’t nearly enough.

After leaving the BSHCI, Will had torn down the road to his motel. He wanted nothing more than to get there, feed the dog, and collapse into bed, but his attention had been drawn by the neon lights of a roadside bar. He'd pulled off the road and into the bar's parking lot before he'd consciously realized what he was doing.

When he did realize it, he got out of the car and walked inside.

He didn't know how long he'd been here, but he was drunk. His eyes were drooping and his mind was spinning, but this time in a hazy way instead of a panicked way like earlier, in Hannibal's cell.

Will didn't know what he was trying to accomplish by drinking himself to a stupor, but if it was to forget, then he hadn't quite managed it yet. He could still remember everything Hannibal had said to him in their last conversation, swirling around his cloudy mind with words that Hannibal had spoken to him years ago.

What a cunning boy you are.

The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.

The mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else.

You are alone, because you are unique.

I have huge faith in you, Will. I always have.

With all my knowledge and intuition I could never entirely predict you. I can feed the caterpillar, I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.

You must understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance.

"Shut up," Will whispered under his breath, squeezing his eyes shut. "Shut up…"

But Hannibal's voice wouldn't go away. It was there, loud and clear, murmuring words about Will and forcing him to listen. Will couldn't help but notice that all the things Hannibal was murmuring were words of *praise.*

Great, Will thought. *Why couldn't I have remembered all the awful things he's said to me?*

Will wasn't drunk enough for this. He raised his glass for the bartender to give him another drink, then drank it down. The alcohol burned, and Will welcomed it. It was a good distraction from Hannibal's whisperings in his mind.

But without focusing on Hannibal's words, Will didn't have anything for his mind to latch onto. Without a tether, he could feel himself slipping, both further into the fog of alcohol and further from his carefully constructed self-control.

He was standing at the edge of the cliff, the soft soil threatening to give way beneath him.

The last time he'd felt like this was about four years ago, after he'd gotten out of prison and attempted his foolish plan of manipulating Hannibal into being caught. They had been pushing each other then, a give and take that felt too intimate for what it was supposed to be. Although Will had gained Hannibal's trust, he had gotten dangerously close to giving into what Hannibal called "his Becoming".

He remembered Randall Tier, and how killing him felt a thousand times better than killing Garrett Jacob Hobbs, which had felt good in itself. Both were technically self-defense, a fact that Will was very much aware of while he was killing them. He had the opportunity, and he took it. He *enjoyed* it.

Back then, he'd been close to chasing that pleasure. But he'd resisted because the desire to make Hannibal face justice, to make him pay for his actions, was greater.

Now that Hannibal had paid for his crimes, there wasn't a competing desire holding Will back from giving into his impulses.

He just felt so *close* to the tipping point. The fear of succumbing to that side of himself melded right into his painful feelings for Hannibal, making his chest ache and his hand reach for another drink.

Ache . He'd been using that word almost subconsciously to describe his feelings ever since Bedelia had mentioned it in their therapy session. He knew it wasn't a coincidence that he'd been thinking it, and he wasn't sober enough now to deny what it meant.

He ached for Hannibal. He loved him, and although Will was aware that he was fucked up for being in love with a killer, it made complete sense to him because he was a killer too.

Everything fell into place with that acceptance. He'd been fighting the truth of his feelings for so long, and now that he couldn't deny it anymore all the parts of himself that were jagged no longer scraped against the edges of his mind. He no longer had to anguish over why he was so fixated on Hannibal, or drown in guilt over worrying about him. Love was the answer, and it was the excuse.

Will sighed then, the weight of his emotions lessening every time he repeated the truth to himself.

I love him. I love him. I'm in love with Hannibal goddamn Lecter.

Perhaps he should've felt worse with that acceptance, and Will knew that a better man would have. But he was not a good man, and not even a bad one. He was just himself, a mix of good and bad, and he was tired of forcing himself to try to be something he wasn't.

He supposed that it was true, what people said about love changing you. His love for Hannibal had changed him, in so many ways and in so many instances that he couldn't keep track of them. Love had changed Hannibal, too.

Will still remembered that winter night, when Hannibal knelt in the snow and surrendered because he thought Will didn't want him anymore.

So although Will did not feel shame or torment at the realization of his love for Hannibal, neither did he feel joy. It felt like a natural progression from Will's current state of mind, which was threatening to spiral out of control. Admitting that he was in love with Hannibal was the first step off the ledge, the first indication that he was losing his careful self-control.

Sitting at the counter of a roadside bar, drinking what must have been his eighth glass of whiskey, Will couldn't bring himself to care.

It didn't matter anymore. The Dragon was still dead, Hannibal was still in prison, and Will was still alone.

You're not alone, Will, Hannibal's voice whispered inside his mind. *I'm standing right beside you.*

"You're not," Will slurred miserably. "You're not h-here."

He couldn't hold back the tears that dripped from his eyes into his whiskey glass.

"Maybe you've had enough," the bartender said, not unkindly.

Her words pierced Will's foggy mind and he let out a shuddering breath, suddenly grateful that he was sitting at the end of the bar, far from the other patrons. He raised his head to catch the bartender's glance, then dug out some money and placed it in front of her.

He didn’t say anything in reply, and simply grabbed his glass to drain the last of his whiskey before sliding off his chair and stumbling out of the bar into the crisp night air.

Will was only a few miles away from his motel at most, but had enough sense left to call a taxi. Except, when he pulled out his phone, the screen wouldn’t light up.

It took Will a few seconds to realize it was dead.

Cursing, he shoved his phone back in his pocket and took out his car keys. It would be fine if he drove really slow, right?

By some miracle, it did end up being fine. Will pulled into the motel’s parking lot at a snail’s pace, then got out and walked to his room even slower. He didn’t want to go to sleep, because when he woke up he’d have to leave and he didn’t know where he’d go.

Will fumbled in putting the key in the lock, but eventually succeeded and wrenched the old door open. He shuffled inside, not even bothering to look up as he turned on the light and closed the door. He wanted to just feed the dog and collapse into bed.

Suddenly, a heavy mass collided with Will’s back and slammed him into the door. Will’s eyes flew open in surprise as adrenaline shot through his body and he reacted on instinct, throwing his elbows back and trying to dislodge whoever was on him.

But his movements were still sluggish with alcohol and uncoordinated, so all he succeeded in doing was tipping them both over onto the floor in a sort of wrestling position. Will tried to get out of the tight hold the attacker had on his chest, but just as he began trying to pry the person’s hands off, a foul-smelling rag was slapped over his mouth and nose, suffocating him.

Chloroform, Will realized before his mind slid into unconsciousness. *Oh shit.*

He woke up to water being unceremoniously splashed in his face.

Jolting at the cold temperature, Will raised his head and blinked groggily as his senses returned to him. As his vision cleared he took in the sight of his motel room, and he remembered what had happened. Drinking at the bar, then returning to sleep only to get incapacitated by some intruder.

Not just any intruder, Will's mind supplied through the haze of alcohol and chloroform.

As he blinked again and eyed the familiar man sitting on his bed, holding a gun, Will was a bit surprised. He'd honestly thought the Dragon was dead.

He was smarter and more daring than Will had given him credit for.

"Do you think you can sit up?" Dolarhyde asked, voice rasping. "Try to sit up."

Will blinked some more, and felt some latent tears slip out of the corner of his eye. He did as instructed and pivoted into an upright position, having no trouble doing so. He wasn't restrained or incapacitated at all.

"You didn't break my back," Will realized, remembering the Dragon's earlier threat.

Dolarhyde leaned forward and studied him with a slight frown.

"Your face… is closed to me."

Will didn't think that was possible. His empathetic connection with killers always worked both ways, to his detriment. And Hannibal's delight.

“If I can see you,” he murmured, defeated, “you can see me.”

The Dragon’s lips curled upwards. “You think you understand, don’t you?”

The words weren’t special, but they immediately reminded Will of words that had been floating around his drunk mind, and he was unable to stop them from tumbling out of his mouth.

“I understand that ‘blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance’,” Will responded, yearning and regret coloring his words. “Hannibal said those words. *To me.”*

He dimly recognized that there was no real reason to bring up those words, or Hannibal, to the Dragon. But, he couldn’t help it. The two intoxicants had whittled away his social graces and dismissed his verbal filter, so the first thing Will thought of was what ended up coming out of his mouth.

Dolarhyde’s eyes bore into him. “I wanted to share with Lecter… and Lecter betrayed me.”

“He betrayed me too,” Will whispered.

“I would like to share,” Dolarhyde emphasized.

“You shared,” Will responded slowly. “With Reba.”

“I shared with Reba a little,” he granted. “In a way that she could survive.”

“But you didn’t change her,” Will noted.

“I chose not to change her,” Dolarhyde dismissed. “I’m stronger than the Dragon now.”

Will sincerely doubted that, and that’s what got his sluggish mind racing.

This was an opportunity. It was just the thing that Will needed to push him over that ledge, to give him the excuse of letting go and succumb to what he *wanted* to do, instead of clinging pointlessly to what he *should* do.

Once he let go and made the decision, a sense of overwhelming freedom washed over him. It resembled the rush he got when he manipulated Chilton into harm’s way, but it was more heady than that because this time he was actively participating.

“Hannibal Lecter,” Will said slowly, a plan forming in his mind, “is who you need to change.”

Dolarhyde stared straight at him, and for a moment Will was worried he’d miscalculated, and he wouldn’t be able to manipulate the man as easily as he thought.

But then he opened his mouth to speak, and Will could breathe again.

“I want to meet Lecter,” he said. “How would I manage that?”

Will swallowed, forcing himself to remain calm and not talk too quickly, too eagerly. He wasn’t planning very far into the future, which he knew could backfire on him. He just knew that he couldn’t leave Hannibal to rot in prison. Not again.

Whatever came after that… Will would figure it out.

“You can’t go to him,” Will began. “Dr. Bloom at the BSHCI thoroughly checks the backgrounds of each visitor he receives.”

“We need to break him out,” Dolarhyde said, following along.

Will nodded. “Most prisoners escape during transport. I can handle that part. You just need to be there, when the time is right.”

Dolarhyde nodded back. “How will I know when the time is right?”

Will hesitated. “Call me in three days. That should be enough time for me to arrange things.”

Dolarhyde reached for the motel stationery and wrote down Will’s number as he told him. Once done, he carefully folded it up and put it in his back pocket like something precious.

Will thought that was the end of it, but instead of getting up and leaving Will alone for the night, Dolarhyde just leaned back into his previous position on the bed.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked gruffly. “If it’s a trap, I will kill you.”

“As expected,” Will shrugged. “And I’m doing it because…”

He thought about it. He couldn’t tell Dolarhyde the real reason, that he loved Hannibal and wanted him out of prison, no matter what came after that. He still had the desire to kill the man, to wrap his hands around his throat and squeeze the life out of him for what he did to Molly. But he also wanted him by his side, smiling with those eyes shining with pride as Will fully realized his Becoming.

“Because Hannibal Lecter does not belong in prison,” he settled on.

“He belongs in the ground,” Dolarhyde nodded. “He deserves to be changed.”

Will nodded back sagely, although he wasn’t sure if he agreed.

“Mr. Graham,” Dolarhyde said then, standing up. “Thank you for all your help.”

Will did not stand up, instead staying in his chair and mindful of the gun.

“Thank you for this opportunity,” he replied truthfully.

The Dragon inclined his head, his eyes intense. “Remember what I said about traps.”

Then he walked out of the door and into the night.

Will developed a massive headache as soon as the Dragon left his motel room, and didn’t even bother drying off his wet hair before collapsing into bed.

At least, he did check on the dog. It was unconscious, but alive. A small needle mark was in its neck, so Will figured that Dolarhyde only drugged it instead of poisoning it this time.

The next morning, both the dog and Will were awake by noon. Will’s headache was actually worse now that the alcohol had left his system and the hangover had set in. He downed a few glasses of water, fed the dog, then left to go buy himself some bacon and eggs from the nearby diner. Perfect food to cure a hangover, and to prepare himself for facing Jack Crawford.

He could go to Jack and tell him everything. Tell him that the Dragon wasn’t dead, and that he visited him in his hotel room last night wanting to meet Hannibal. He could do that, but

then Jack would take control of the entire operation.

And, for once, *Will* wanted to be the one in control.

He wanted to be in control because he was tired of taking orders from Jack and being used like a secret weapon. Because he wanted Hannibal out of prison, and Jack would never let that happen. Because he still needed time to figure out what to do after Hannibal was free.

It wasn't lost on Will that he was choosing to break the law. Aiding a wanted man and orchestrating a prison break were serious crimes that could land him in jail. But neither the punishment, nor the legal immorality, fazed him anymore.

He'd stopped caring about those sorts of things quite recently.

This opportunity was too good to pass by. Will had done what he was supposed to do, in saying goodbye to Hannibal and walking away with every intention of staying away, even if his heart screamed at him to do otherwise. He had resisted, but that had been the last time.

He'd used up all his strength in denying what he wanted then, and now that fate had provided this golden chance, Will could finally let himself take it.

There was really no other option, after admitting his feelings and opening the door inside himself that he'd long kept closed. It was open now, and he was curiously excited about what he'd find inside. About what he would do.

Because that was just the thing. Will had no idea what he would do beyond the point of using the Dragon to break Hannibal out. The unknown used to worry him, but now…

Now, he'd come to accept it just like the other parts of himself he'd come to accept after battling them for so long.

So when Will was called into the FBI lab that afternoon, he went gladly.

He was only half-paying attention to Price and Zeller's overexaggerated explanation about the Dragon surviving the fire. He only snapped out of his own head when they stopped talking for longer than a half second to allow Jack his analysis, then did his best to look bothered.

"The Great Red Dragon lives," he revealed.

Jack pulled him into the hallway, looking grave and more tired than perhaps Will had ever seen him.

"We were close before, but now he's got the advantage." Jack pursed his lips. "He's hiding."

Will nodded as Jack looked away.

"The obvious thing is to get him to come to us," he began, sneaking a look at Jack's turned head to make sure he didn't suspect anything. Luckily, there was no distrust. Only weariness. "Bait him with something he wants more than me."

Jack didn't look particularly surprised at this proposed plan, which meant he probably thought of it too. Still, he didn't look happy about it.

"He'd have to be an idiot to go for it, "Jack said bitterly.

"I know," Will said. He was all too aware of how precarious this plan was, and the many ways his real plan could go wrong. But the rewards far outweighed the risks, so Will was pushing through. "Want to hear what the best bait would be?"

Jack sighed in defeat. "I'm not sure I want to."

“Hannibal would be the best bait,” Will drawled, trying to make it sound like he hated the suggestion.

“Why in God’s name would anybody want to meet Hannibal Lecter,” Jack muttered.

“Well, to kill him, Jack,” Will murmured confidently. “The Dragon could absorb him that way, engulf him, become more than he is.”

Jack considered this, nodding a bit to himself. Then his eyes focused again, and he studied Will.

“You sound pretty sure.”

Will’s stomach dropped. Maybe he was pushing too hard, sounding too confident about this being the only way forward. He wanted to avoid suspicion from Jack at any cost, so he forcefully shoved down his panic and shrugged nonchalantly.

“I’m not sure, who’s sure?” he questioned. “I’m not even sure Hannibal would draw the Dragon. I just say that it’s *our best shot.”*

His words came out a tad more passionate than he meant them too. Will held his breath, just hoping that Jack took his intensity as desire to catch the Dragon and not desperation for Hannibal to be free.

Apparently he did, since Jack didn’t even spare him a second glance.

“Set him up how?” he probed. Will could tell that his mind was already running through scenarios of how this could go down.

Will looked away and paused, attempting to look like he was just coming up with a plan on the spot and not like he spent hours thinking about it.

“We take Hannibal into federal custody,” he ventured. “We fake an escape.”

Jack scowled.

“It’s a shit plan,” he muttered. “But you’re right. It’s our best shot.”

Will nodded grimly, but on the inside his heart was soaring from the power of manipulating Jack, and the hope that his plan could actually work.

“I’ll let Alana know,” Jack said. “She’ll take some convincing.”

“I’ll leave you to it,” Will said, already walking away. “We can work out the details later. I have an appointment.”

Bedelia’s face went pale when Will told her the news of their plan to “fake” Hannibal’s escape.

It was the most shaken he’d ever seen her, and he relished that he made her so speechless. Exchanging verbal hits with her had given him an outlet for his restless energy, but now he’d found another outlet to channel it into. He was *using* it now, instead of getting rid of it.

Bedelia broke out of her stunned trance to slowly stand up and walk over to the bar cart behind her. Will had been aware of her propensity for wine; her and Hannibal’s house in Italy had been very well stocked. He took a sort of sick pleasure in watching her pour brandy for herself now, instead of wine. He must have really knocked her off balance.

It’s not as much as she deserved, but it was a good start.

Bedelia wet her lips with the spirit, her thoughts apparently collected enough to speak.

"We assign a moment to decision." She took another sip of her drink, her hand shaking. "What you propose is so *thoughtless* ... I find it difficult to believe that moment exists."

Will tilted his head to the side. "Decisions are made of kneaded feelings. They're more often a lump than a sum."

Bedelia's expression morphed from plain fear, to fear mixed with anger.

"However you think you're going to manipulate this situation to your advantage," she stormed, returning back to her seat across from Will, " *think again."*

"There is no advantage," Will responded truthfully. "It's all degrees of disadvantage."

All the possibilities he'd let his mind wander through were similarly dire. He wasn't sure which one he preferred the most, which one was the best, and which one he'd actually end up acting on. He was familiar with uncertainty now, but he still disliked it.

Bedelia shot him a withering look. *"He who holds the Devil, let him hold him well. He will hardly be caught a second time."*

Will knew Bedelia was smart enough to work out that any "fake" escape would surely turn into a real escape if Hannibal Lecter was involved. With Will's involvement or not, Hannibal would no doubt find an opportunity to exploit the FBI's plan. But, she didn't account for one thing.

"I don't intend Hannibal to be caught a second time," Will whispered, staring back at Bedelia just as hard.

Understanding finally clicked behind her eyes, and Will felt a sense of lightness. Somebody knew what he was up to, but it wouldn't matter. Bedelia had no faith in the authorities anymore. He'd only let her know because he wanted her to understand the path he had chosen, and be afraid.

And also, to warn her of what was coming. Not out of the goodness of his heart, but as the hunter that let the prey escape to see if they were stupid, or arrogant, enough to stick around.

He was curious what she would do.

"Can't live with him, can't live without him," Bedelia scoffed. "Is that what this is?"

Will shrugged. "I guess… this is… my Becoming."

Finally. After all this time, he was finally giving into it. It had started with arranging Chilton's demise, and now it was culminating in manipulating Hannibal's escape and orchestrating a final showdown between him and the Red Dragon.

He still didn't know what he wanted the result of that fight to be, but he liked it that way. Instead of clinging to what he was supposed to want and ignoring his other desires, he was opening himself up to multiple possibilities, without limitation.

"What you are becoming is pathological," Bedelia muttered, getting up again for another drink.

"Extreme acts of cruelty require a high degree of empathy," he said, throwing her past words in her face. He remembered that line because he liked it; instead of pathologizing his capacity for violence, Bedelia explained it away like it was the natural order of things.

But he doubted she would have said it if she'd grasped the full implications of what it meant for Will.

“You’ve just found religion,” she mocked. “Nothing more dangerous than that.”

Will stood up from his own chair, taking his time to leave her alone to her terror. He still had some things to promise.

“I’d pack my bags if I were you, Bedelia,” he announced, smirking a bit. “Meat’s back on the menu.”

Bedelia’s face contorted into an expression of hateful anger.

“You righteous, reckless, *twitchy* little man,” she spat. “He might as well cut all of our throats and be done with it.”

Hannibal might do that. In fact, Bedelia was right and Hannibal should do that. It would give himself the best chance for survival.

But then again, Will thought he’d be more particular about whose throats to cut. Hannibal might have changed him, but he’d changed Hannibal in return.

Did you think you could change me? Like I’ve changed you?

I already did.

With all his memories of Hannibal lurking in the back of his brain, and excitement for the future buzzing in the front, Will turned to look at Bedelia one last time.

“Ready or not,” he warned. “Here he comes.”

Hannibal was standing in his cell when he smelled Alana's perfume, but in truth, he wasn't there at all.

In his mind, he was thousands of miles away, in his favorite little *Cappella* in all of Italy.

He'd retreated there after Will had said his goodbye. His cunning, cruel boy. What little flash of anger Hannibal had after hearing of his manipulation had quickly faded away into pride. He had succeeded, even just a little bit, in coaxing Will into being his true self.

But then Will had left, and Hannibal was hit with a new feeling. Grief.

It was comparable to how he'd felt three years ago, when he'd first been caged. He had been dealing with the heartbreak following Will's speech after Muskrat Farm, and yearning to see his beloved again. But there had also been hope that he would, indeed, see Will again.

Now, he wasn't so sure.

Will had, as expected, come back to see him. It had taken longer than expected and a fair amount of pushing, but he came. He'd talked to Hannibal, and looked at him, and even began to listen to him again.

But that was all over now. The Dragon was dead, and Will didn't want to stay.

The optimist in Hannibal maintained that too much had changed for Will, that he wouldn't be able to just go back to his pre-packaged wife and son so easily. He knew that Will had gotten close this time, possibly closer than he'd ever been, to realizing his becoming. What he did to Dr. Chilton was testament to that.

But Hannibal couldn't be fully certain of his hopes. Will was the most stubborn person he knew.

So after Will had turned his back on Hannibal and walked away, Hannibal had retreated into the foyer of his mind palace, which had long become his favorite room due to the memories he and Will shared there.

With his eyes closed, Hannibal imagined a choir singing songs of mourning, and candles being lit at the altar in prayer. He imagined a congregation sitting in all black, veils draped over their faces to hide their grief.

He stayed in the Cappella Palatina like that, until Alana interrupted his wake.

"There's a deal for you, Hannibal," she said, annoyed. "Or there could be."

"A deal?" Hannibal inquired without turning around. "With whom?"

He could smell Alana's displeasure through the small holes in the glass wall.

"The FBI."

Hannibal turned to face the side wall of his cell. "Jack couldn't ask me himself?"

"Jack doesn't know you as well as I do," she grumbled. "He thought if he asked you for help, you would just torment him."

On the contrary, it sounded like Jack knew him moderately well.

"Quite right, too," Hannibal quipped. "How wise of Jack."

Alana's annoyance seemed to grow.

"The Red Dragon faked his death," she said.

Hannibal's face did not move, and neither did he blink. He gave no indication that the news made him feel anything, apart from the slight loosening of his hands behind his back.

The Dragon was alive, which meant that Will was still here.

An incredible sense of relief spread throughout Hannibal's body, making him feel like a dying plant finally given nourishment to grow. Instead of the sad mourning songs, his mind was instead exploding into a cacophony of angel choruses and hallelujahs. The Dragon was alive, and *Will was still here.*

He restrained his inner joy, stood up straight, and fully turned to face Alana.

"Good for him," Hannibal replied.

"Jack wants to fake your escape," Alana continued. "I release you into police custody, and Jack uses you as bait."

Hannibal mulled this plan over. It was obvious that they were desperate to catch the Dragon, especially after he'd pulled the wool over their faces. Desperate enough to use Hannibal as bait in a fake escape.

They must also be aware of the inherent risks to this plan, that Hannibal may actually escape — and then they'd have two notorious serial killers on the loose. It was a dreadfully weak plan, even if Hannibal was restrained the entire time. He didn't think Jack would have gone for it, unless someone else spoke up in its favor.

If it was Will… Hannibal's blood rushed at the thought. Will was smarter than Jack and Alana combined. If he wanted this plan to happen, then he must have an alternate agenda that he wasn't telling them.

At least, Hannibal hoped that was the case. He had huge faith in Will, after all.

"Was it Will's idea?" Hannibal asked, trying to be casual.

Alana didn't seem surprised that he asked. "Yes."

"Yes, that worked out so well for Frederick Chilton," Hannibal said dryly. He paused. "Do please tell Frederick, if you see him, I wish a speedy convalescence and hope he won't be very ugly."

Alana looked angry now.

"I've been on the phone for hours on your behalf, and this is what you get — "

"Any rational society would either kill me, or give me my books," Hannibal interrupted.

If this plan was going to work out the way Jack and Alana wanted it to, then Hannibal wouldn't be able to escape for real, and he'd need his books back. One should always be prepared for every eventuality.

Alana chewed her lip. "If you cooperate in the capture of Francis Dolarhyde you get your books, your drawings… your toilet. All privileges will be restored."

Hannibal walked closer to the glass. "You trust Will with my well-being?"

“As much as I trust you with his,” she replied. Meaning, not at all.

“You trust me with yours?” he wondered. “You intend to release me into police custody. Police are not as wise as you are.”

He leaned closer to the glass.

“I might escape in earnest, and come to kill you,” he murmured.

Alana swallowed. “First chance you get, I assume.”

“You died in my kitchen, Alana, when you chose to be brave. *Every moment since* is borrowed.” Hannibal stared her down. “Your wife. Your child. They belong to me.”

The color drained out of her face.

“We made a bargain for Will’s life, and I spun you gold,” he said, reminding her of her debt. A debt that must be collected.

Alana gave him one last frightened look, then spun around on her heels and quickly walked away.

As the doors banged shut behind her, Hannibal turned back to the wall, closing his eyes. Only this time, instead of reminiscing upon skulls engraven on floors, he dreamed of the blood that Will might yet spill.

The next time Hannibal was restrained it was entirely expected, and he smiled as the orderlies strapped him onto the stand-up wheelchair. When Will entered his cell, the mourners in

Hannibal's mind took their veils off, and watched as he entered into the Cappella Palatina to stand before Hannibal.

Hannibal imagined Will walking down the center aisle towards the front altar, where he stood. It reminded him of the procedures of a wedding, and the thought was comforting if not a bit premature.

Hannibal had his desires, but he placed more importance on the well-being of the man standing in front of him.

Will looked good. Quite good. He stood up straight, with confidence, and had none of the anger or restraint on him like he did last time they spoke. In fact, Hannibal thought he looked quite relaxed, all things considered.

The sight made him smile wider.

"I thought you said your goodbyes," Hannibal greeted.

"We have one last goodbye between us," Will said lightly.

Hannibal's eyes sparkled. "You didn't just say goodbye though, did you? That little extra bit at the end. What was that you said?"

"You'd never have turned yourself in unless I rejected you," Will recalled, seeming fond of the memory.

"Yes. That extra bit." Hannibal tilted his head. "I believe that's what they call a 'mic drop'. You dropped the mic, Will. But here you are, having to come back and pick it up again."

Will clasped his hands together behind his back and smiled slightly, not at all angry at getting called out. Instead, he seemed happy about it. Like it was the first time someone had honestly

teased him, in an innocent and uncruel way, in a long time.

The thought made Hannibal's heart swell. Will deserved these little bits of happiness and ease, and Hannibal was all too willing to provide them.

"I knew you'd keep running if I kept chasing you," Will mused. "I knew you wanted me to know exactly where I could find you, when I needed to."

When, Hannibal noted gladly. Not *if.*

"And you did," Hannibal pointed out.

Will stared at him for a moment, not saying anything. Simply looking. Hannibal looked back, waiting for what he'd say. Waiting for what he wanted to hear.

"I need you, Hannibal," Will drawled with a smirk.

Hannibal matched his expression. "Ding Dong, the Dragon's *not* dead."

Another light tease, intending to make Will smile again. To his delight, it worked.

"He told you he wanted to meet you, maybe that was a serious invitation," Will mused, walking closer to Hannibal.

Hannibal's heart pounded, incredibly aware that this was the closest Will had been to him, without any barriers between them, in over three years.

"After the big escape, you send a message to the Dragon in the personal ads, ask him for a rendezvous," Will continued.

“He won’t go near a mail drop,” Hannibal said without any hesitation. He wanted to test out the strength of Will’s plan, to get a better sense of what it actually was. He had theories, but he couldn’t be completely sure. He had to rely on Will’s subtle signals, and wait patiently.

The one thing he was certain about was that Will was in complete control of what was happening. He’d known that the second he walked through the door, when he looked relaxed and happy instead of pained and bitter.

Hannibal loved that Will was finally doing what was truly best for him.

“He might be curious enough to look at one, see if you sold him,” Will shrugged. “We chose a drop that can be watched only from a few places, from a long way off. We’ll stake out the observation points.”

Hannibal wanted to prod a bit more.

“It sounds weak to you, even as you say it,” he noted.

Will didn’t even blink. His lips curved upward into a smile like he was glad Hannibal was vetting his plan, like he was showing off how much he’d thought this endeavor through.

Hannibal wanted to kiss him.

“Secret Service has a setup they’ve never used, they’ll let us have it,” he explained easily.

Then, Will raised his eyebrows, almost in amusement.

“You’re our best shot, Hannibal.” He leaned in closer, and lowered his voice. “Please.”

Will leaned out of his space and quirked his eyebrow again, almost as if he was asking *Is that enough? Did I do good?*

Hannibal smiled wider, and nodded subtly.

Hearing Will say *please* in such a tone, so close to him, did things to Hannibal. It sent his mind into overdrive, picturing all the contexts he could imagine of Will saying that word to him, in the exact same way. He tucked it away into the room in his memory palace specially dedicated to Will and his magnetic beauty. Above all, the word filled Hannibal with a pleasant warmth that heated his entire body.

“When?” was his final question.

Will gazed at him with excitement. “Sunrise. Eight hours.”

Then Will waltzed out of his cell, and Hannibal knew he was about to have the longest eight hours of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Next part is the finale ~ There will be a lot of missing scenes, including the drive to the cliffhouse and what all happens when they get there...

The Wrath of the Lamb Part 2

Chapter Summary

> “See?” Hannibal panted, his hot breath puffing close against Will’s face. “This is all I ever wanted for you, Will.” He looked down, uncharacteristically shy. “For both of us.”
>
> “It’s beautiful,” Will breathed.

Chapter Notes

> Ahhhh the last chapter!! The finale!! This chapter is soooo long because I added a lot of missing scenes.
>
> Enjoy everyone!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sky was beautiful as Hannibal was loaded into the portable cage in the back of the transport van. He watched the different shades of red, orange, and pink appear and disappear on the horizon, drinking in his first sunrise in three years. The sight was magnificent, but once inside the car, his view of the sunrise was cut off, and Hannibal shifted his attention to another beautiful sight.

Will was seated directly across from Hannibal’s cage, and he didn’t shy away from staring at Hannibal while various police officers went around to take their assigned seats. Hannibal could hear Alana speaking to someone in the background, but her voice gradually faded away, back into the BSHCI. Jack Crawford was nowhere to be found.

There was only Will, sitting right in front of Hannibal and staring into his eyes. Despite the cage wall between them, they were very close together. Close enough that Hannibal could smell the traces of week-old aftershave.

Hannibal smiled under his half-mask. He didn't know the specifics of Will's plan, but it was obvious with Jack and Alana's absences that Will had fooled them into thinking everything was fine. Hannibal loved to see Will's manipulative side in action, and its presence made him hopeful for other parts of Will to come out soon, parts that had long been buried. Parts that Hannibal saw that nobody else did, and parts that he'd worked hard to carefully bring to the surface of Will's personality.

Could it be that Will was finally heeding Hannibal's advice, and learning to fully accept himself?

It certainly seemed so. At the very least, Hannibal was noticing the signs and rather optimistic for the future.

Thus, although he was currently restrained and trapped in a metal cage in the back of a police van staffed with armed officers, Hannibal was in a very good mood.

A single officer, holding a shotgun, climbed into the back of their vehicle before the door was slammed shut. He shuffled past to sit at Will's left, and then there were a few yells from outside before the van started up and began moving.

Hannibal didn't know how long they were supposed to drive until the "fake" escape was expected to take place, but he supposed it hardly mattered. He was now in the transport van, and by the law of probability it was likely that Will's personal plan would soon derail the official one.

The ride was quite bumpy; a combination of poor road maintenance, a cheap police van, and the medium speed of their drive. They drove longer than Hannibal expected with no interruptions, at least two hours. Hannibal spent the time daydreaming about what was to happen and missing his own car, until Will leaned forward to rest his hands on his knees. Hannibal immediately looked at him, picking up on the purposeful move. The incessant bouncing gave him a nice opportunity to glance down at the officer's shotgun, then back to Will.

It was clear by the look in his eyes that Will understood Hannibal's silent question, but he simply stared at him, unanswering. But as Hannibal stared back, the intensity of Will's gaze deepened.

Suddenly, the sound of a police siren started blaring from behind the van. Hannibal turned his head to the side, and out of the van's back windows saw what looked like a poor imitation of a police cruiser flashing its lights and rapidly approaching their convoy.

Hannibal lost visual of the car as it passed the van, and looked back to Will with fondness. It must be the Dragon. Will was working with the Dragon to break Hannibal out of custody and ensure a real escape.

He wondered if Will had decided what his intentions were in planning and carrying out such a scheme. What end did Will envision when he imagined both Hannibal and the Dragon, not to mention himself, free to attack each other without interference from the law?

Before Hannibal could continue down that train of thought any longer, the loud sound of tires screeching against pavement pierced the air and, almost faster than Hannibal could process, their van violently lurched to the side and tipped over, throwing Hannibal against the wall of his cage.

In the chaos, Will was launched out of his seat and banged against the steel of Hannibal's cage, then hurled onto the floor. The fierce jostling made Hannibal's head spin for a moment, and as he tried to find his bearings his ears pricked up at the muted sound of a gun going off, the gunpowder staining the air with a metallic taste.

He looked up to see a tall, fit man lowering a gun. He had a cleft lip and avoided looking at Hannibal. He must be the Dragon.

Hannibal wisely did not say anything to him; this was not their predetermined meeting place, it was merely an appetizer to the main course.

Hannibal glanced around the van quickly, cataloguing Will's dazed, semiconscious state and approving of the clean headshot to the police officer. There were no more threats, except of course for the serial killer in front of him.

The Dragon put one hand behind his back to tuck his gun away, and when the hand fell to his side, it was brandishing a pair of bolt cutters. He reached out to quickly cut the chains holding Hannibal's cage shut, and when Hannibal turned around in his seat, the Dragon leaned further into the vehicle.

Hannibal could hear his loud breathing as the man got close enough to cut the shackles around Hannibal's ankles and snip the buckles on his straitjacket.

Hannibal hummed in gratitude, and the loud breathing hitched and quickly receded. There was the sound of heavy feet running against the pavement, then the slam of a car door.

Sensing that it was time, Hannibal freed his arms from the straitjacket enough to grab the edges of his cage and boost himself out of the tilted van.

When his unrestrained feet touched the road, and he felt the little, crumbling pieces of gravel underneath his thin prison shoes, Hannibal felt content.

He reached up to undo the mask that had long been a nuisance and carelessly threw it away in favor of taking a deep breath to fill his lungs with fresh air.

Gunpowder was still lingering, but below that Hannibal could smell rain leftover from the night before, and earth from the nearby ditch that his transport van had crashed into. He closed his eyes and breathed again, filling his lungs with scents that weren't the boring, stuffy odors of the BSHCI.

He tugged the straitjacket off as he surveyed his surroundings. They were on a main stretch of road in a semi-rural area, and other cars would likely appear soon. They were miles away from the BSHCI, and Hannibal was optimistic that they could reach their chosen destination and enjoy some leisure time before Alana and Jack were alerted of the crash. However, he needed to confirm with Will first. This was his plan, after all.

As expected, just then Hannibal heard Will groan and struggle his way out of the van. Hannibal didn't have to look to know that all the police officers were dead, leaving him and Will as the only survivors. As it should be.

Hannibal didn't turn to make sure Will was okay, since he was quite confident in Will's abilities to bounce back and adapt to changing circumstances — especially if those circumstances were ones that Will himself orchestrated.

"He's not going to kill us here," Hannibal mused as Will climbed out of the car. "What he wants to do requires something a little more private."

Spotting a nearby police car that looked relatively undamaged, Hannibal walked through the brisk morning air towards it.

"What are you doing?" Will called from behind him.

Hannibal didn't break his stride, but did look over his shoulder to grin, ever so slightly.

"You know, Will, you worry too much," Hannibal noted. He reached the car and opened the door. "You'd be much more comfortable if you relaxed with yourself."

Hannibal grabbed the dead body of the driver and pulled, backing up to get the body out of the car and far enough from the car to not be a bother. Then, he slid into the driver's seat and leaned forward to wipe blood splatter off the windshield.

The keys were on the dashboard. A kind gift from the Dragon, who must have turned the car off to stop it from running into the ditch before Hannibal and Will could jump inside and speed away.

Hannibal turned the car on and slowly pulled up to Will, who was still standing in front of the crashed van and checking both ends of the road, presumably for unexpected visitors.

Leaning to the right and pushing the passenger's side door open, Hannibal also took the opportunity to shove the dead body of the second cop out of the open door, freeing up Will's

seat.

“Going my way?” Hannibal teased.

Will stared at him for a moment.

Then he sighed and got in the car — but not before quickly dropping down and grabbing the gun from the cop newly dumped in front of him.

Hannibal watched, but made no comment.

“Where to?” Will asked as they started driving away.

Hannibal glanced at him out of the corner of his eye.

“You do not have a place picked out?” He smiled slyly. “What about the secret service setup?”

“Shut up,” Will replied. “I figured you’d have a place?”

“I do,” Hannibal allowed happily. “It will take about six hours to reach, since it is south and we have been riding north.”

Will nodded slowly. “That’s probably best. We need to remove the GPS tracker from this car.”

“It’s an older model, so there will be an external device planted in the car instead of tracking software,” Hannibal responded.

“Makes it easy for us,” Will muttered.

“Quite,” Hannibal said, already pulling off to the side of the road. “It would be better if we remove it now, instead of wasting time by planting a false lead on some insignificant highway —.”

“That Jack could probably see through anyway,” Will finished, getting out of the car. “Yeah, okay. I’ll get it.”

Hannibal smiled. They were finishing each other’s sentences now.

It was nice to see evidence of their synchronicity, of their words and actions clearly reflecting the intimacy Hannibal felt between them. He was sure that Will felt that same intimacy, although they’d never addressed it.

Will came around and bent down outside Hannibal’s window. Hannibal rolled it down, a bit disappointed that his view of Will removing the device was obstructed by the trunk of the car.

“This is a piece of shit,” Will declared once Hannibal rolled the window down fully. “It’s only slightly better than the ones we had in New Orleans.”

He turned around, and chucked the thing far into the empty field beside the road.

Hannibal smiled. “Thank you for getting rid of it. If I’m ever in need of a portable GPS tracker, I’ll know which ones to avoid.”

Will rolled his eyes and went around the car to slide back into his seat.

Hannibal rolled up the window, but didn't close it all the way. It was quite nice outside, and he decided to welcome the open, fresh air by leaving the window cracked, just a bit.

Back on the road, this time able to take the familiar route to his oceanside house, Hannibal began thinking again. His connection to Will was something supremely unique and sacred, but Hannibal was content to never address it, at least not explicitly. It was enough that they could be together, for whatever length of time, and be completely authentic with each other, like now. Despite Hannibal's wishes for more, he was at peace with however Will wanted to define, or not define, their bond.

However, Hannibal's skin was crawling with the need to *touch.*

The desire went against Hannibal's rational decision to give Will space, but it was a strong desire that threatened to break free of Hannibal's self-control. In many ways, he couldn't help it. He had been locked up for three years unable to touch anyone at all, let alone the one person he'd wanted to touch, who was now sitting no more than one foot away from him.

It would be so easy for Hannibal to reach over and touch Will. It could just be a light tap to his knee or arm, something that Hannibal could easily explain away and Will could brush off. Or, Hannibal could go further, and lay a hand on Will's knee while keeping the other hand on the steering wheel. The possibilities were numerous, and Hannibal's mind kept generating more to keep up with the incredible, uncontrollable *need* to touch Will.

Hannibal's hand itched to move, and his skin ached to make contact, but somehow he managed to hold himself back. He wasn't a man to touch someone without their permission, or at least without a believable excuse.

So Hannibal clung onto memories of holding Will's face and of washing blood off his hands, and hoped they would sustain him.

It was going to be a long drive.

Hannibal hesitated. "The — "

“Can we please not talk?” Will interrupted. “I just — it’s too much. Please.”

A fresh pain of sadness went through Hannibal. He knew that Will struggled with processing things, but it was too much for Hannibal to even speak to him?

He didn’t like that. He wanted to be a calming presence for Will, someone whom Will entrusted with his well-being. He may have made some mistakes in the past in that area, but Hannibal had changed. *Will* had changed him. He was dejected that Will apparently wasn’t aware of that, after everything Hannibal had done to show him his true feelings.

Hannibal opened his mouth.

“The name of the town,” Hannibal murmured, breaking the tense silence between them. “It’s Achilles.”

Will jolted in his seat at the name, and he met Hannibal’s gaze with wide eyes. They stared at each other for a moment, Hannibal neglecting his duties as a responsible driver in favor of deconstructing the multiple emotions in Will’s eyes.

But before he could see everything, Will turned away to look out the window.

Silence fell again, but this time it was more raw than tense, and Hannibal dared not to break it.

Will got out of the cop car and sighed. That was a long drive, even though he spent most of it catching up on much needed sleep.

He wasn’t sure what he expected from Hannibal’s secret safe house, but somehow the sleek, modern art-looking building situated at the edge of a cliff, a fair distance from any neighbors and miles from town, wasn’t surprising at all.

It was almost evening, although the only reason Will knew that was the slowly darkening sky and his internal clock that sounded when his stomach rumbled in hunger. He had left his cell phone on the bedside table of his motel room, since he didn’t want to be tracked or deal with people’s calls. Jack would inevitably attempt to track him with it, and be able to take care of the Leeds’s dog in his place. If Will made it to tomorrow, then he’d go back and retrieve it. If not…

Will shook those thoughts away. They did not bother him, but it was no use to dwell on the future if he was still unsure about its path.

Hannibal caught Will’s attention when he started walking, not to the house, but to the cliffside to the side of the driveway. Will followed, and soon they stood side by side, watching the powerful ocean waves crash against the tall rock cliffs.

It was a fair way’s down. Not as high as Will was expecting, but still enough for his body’s instincts to kick in and make him keep a few feet from the ledge.

“The bluff is eroding,” Hannibal observed. “There was more land when I was here with Abigail. More land still when I was here with Miriam Lass.”

Will raised his head from the sea to look at Hannibal’s face, something he’d avoided doing in the car. He’d ridden in cars with Hannibal before, but after realizing both their feelings for each other, the proximity of it suddenly seemed too much for Will to handle. But now, Will wasn’t in a confined space and felt more in control of his body in relation to Hannibal’s.

The mention of Miriam Lass didn’t make him feel anything, and the mention of Abigail only served to fill Will with a dull sadness. He was no longer angry with Hannibal about what he did to her, knowing that the responsibility for her fate was shared between them. He could imagine Abigail here, standing on the same bluff as they were now, gazing out towards the open ocean and wondering when she’d be able to live even a semblance of a normal life.

Will was sad that she was never able to.

"Now you're here with me," he said after a moment, wanting to focus more on the present instead of the past, or even the future.

"And the bluff is still eroding," Hannibal responded. "You and I are suspended over the roiling Atlantic. Soon, all of this will be lost to the sea."

Will didn't doubt him.

Hannibal turned away to go inside, and Will noticed that his pace was quick, like it was when he commandeered the police cruiser. It was clear that Hannibal was eager to get here, and Will supposed he knew why. Being forced to wear ugly prison jumpsuits, when Hannibal's taste was for much finer clothes, must be uncomfortable. Will was hit with familiar guilt over his role in taking away Hannibal's comforts.

Well, at least he was giving them back now. Even if he wouldn't have them again by this time tomorrow.

Will turned away from the edge to escape those creeping thoughts of the future, and followed Hannibal into the house. The older man had retrieved a key from underneath a rock on the porch, an incredibly normal hiding place that made Will almost smile at its domesticity. His amusement swiftly turned into curiosity as he entered the house, and looked around.

The first thing he noticed was the furniture, a respectable number of pieces scattered across what seemed to be the dining room and living room. There were chairs, a sleek dining room table, a grand piano, and a few couches and other tables. They were all uncovered, and without even a speck of dust.

To his right, Hannibal flipped a switch and the lights came on immediately, illuminating a small hallway further down the house that seemed to lead to additional rooms. Bedroom and bathroom, most likely.

Will wasn't able to hold his tongue. "Who's been keeping this place for you?"

Hannibal turned towards him, eyes glittering. "Who do you think?"

"Who else could it be, except Chiyoh," Will muttered, walking further inside the house. "I don't understand why she's so loyal to you."

"We try to help our families when we can," Hannibal replied lightly, his familiar words vividly reminding Will of when Hannibal had last told him that, in prison.

You're family, Will.

"It's nice," Will blurted, desperately needing to cut off the wave of emotion that threatened to rise up at those words.

Hannibal smiled slightly. "I'm glad you like it. If you come with me, I'll show you to your room."

Will frowned. His room?

His feet trailed behind Hannibal as he led them down the side hallway, which Will now saw had four doors leading off it. Hannibal pushed open the first door and gestured for Will to glance inside.

"Bathroom," he said. "Yours has a private one, but this is the one for the other two bedrooms."

Will nodded slowly, a bit surprised that Hannibal had given the ensuite bathroom to Will instead of taking it for himself. But after a moment, he wasn't surprised at all. Only aching with the awareness of love, and the uncertainty of what to do with it.

“This is my room,” Hannibal said next, nodding to the door next to the bathroom, a bit further down the hallway. “Yours is the one at the end of the hall.”

Will nodded again, somehow being incredibly grateful and pissed off at the same time about Hannibal giving them separate rooms, albeit they were directly adjacent.

“What about this room?” Will asked, looking at the fourth door, across the hall from the bathroom and a bit further down from the bedrooms.

Hannibal hesitated, and Will raised an eyebrow. Hannibal Lecter struggling to decide on words was a rare thing.

“It’s Abigail’s,” he said softly.

Will inhaled sharply, and looked at the door with wide eyes.

This wasn’t just a safe house where Abigail spent her days in hiding. It was a house that Hannibal set aside for all three of them, as a family. Hannibal had bedrooms for all three of them set up. He figured that Abigail’s room looked lived in, although Will didn’t think he’d be able to handle actually opening up the door to find out.

Will’s heart burned. He thought that he could handle being in a house where Abigail once spent time, but it was different now that it wasn’t just a safe house, but their *family* house. And how Hannibal had said it *is* Abigail’s room, instead of it *was* — it was her space, just a touch away from Will’s fingertips.

Would her bed be made, or messy as most teenagers’ beds were? Would there be a book on her bedside table, progress marked halfway? Would her clothes still smell like her?

Will was torn with the need to know the answer to those questions, and the desire to run away and avoid that door like the plague. Grief was a funny thing, he supposed; it could come out when you least expected it, and throw your mind into chaos.

He took a deep breath, and forced himself to turn away from the door. He wouldn't open it. It would only remind him of the past, bring him pain, and dredge Abigail up from the depths. Will didn't want that. Abigail deserved to rest in peace.

He decided that Hannibal probably didn't touch Abigail's room at all, and instructed Chiyoh to leave it be. Parents who lost a child often left their room as a memorial, frozen in time to commemorate the child's life as it was when they passed. It's what Will would have done, in his place. They were so similar and synchronous that Will knew Hannibal had done just that.

Will sighed. He could only imagine what his own room would be like, and what new pain it would bring.

It seemed as if he was about to find out.

"There are clean clothes and fresh toiletries if you wish to use them," Hannibal said quietly, placing a hand on the handle to his own room. "I'll prepare dinner shortly."

Will nodded robotically, unable to speak, and Hannibal disappeared inside his room. Leaving Will frozen in front of Abigail's room, staring at the door at the end of the hall.

It's just a room, Will told himself. *Your room, that Hannibal reserved for you. It'll be fine.*

But deep inside, it was the fact that Hannibal set the room aside for him specifically that gave Will cause for concern.

He allowed himself another breath, then walked down the hallway and slowly opened the door.

At first glance, the room was nothing special. It was a comfortable size, certainly larger than any bedroom Will had before. There was a queen-sized bed situated against the middle of the far wall, outfitted with modest, deep green bedding. A dresser sat by another wall, tall and made of dark mahogany. There was a closet as well, its door slightly open to allow for adequate air flow. Will spotted the door to the ensuite bathroom next to it. Lastly, there was a floor-to-ceiling bookcase on the remaining wall.

Maybe Will could handle this. It was basic, and not cluttered with decorations or things he didn't need. Judging that it was safe to venture forward, Will closed the door behind him and started to inspect the room in greater detail.

He went to the bookshelf first. Not because he was interested in reading right now, but because he was curious to see what kinds of books Hannibal had picked out for him. His eyes scanned the titles, and his heart fluttered in his chest.

Fly Fishing for the Masters. The Encyclopedia of Dog Breeds. Criminology Theories and Practices. Ancient and Modern Psychological Sciences.

In addition to the non-fiction titles, there were also an array of fiction ones:

The Lord of the Flies. The Full Works of Edgar Allan Poe. The Iliad. Frankenstein. The Stranger.

They were not all books that Will had read, but they were certainly ones that captured his interests. In fact, Will could say that the entire bookshelf was an accurate reflection of his personality, interests, and taste in literature.

Suddenly struck with a terribly wonderful thought, Will turned away from the bookshelf and went over to the dresser. Wrenching open the first drawer, he found a good supply of underwear and socks. All the same type he used to have at his old home in Wolf Trap.

Surprise and embarrassment tore through Will like a bullet. He'd known that Hannibal had poked around his old house, but he hadn't considered that the man had snooped in his *underwear drawer.* Will wasn't offended, and in fact it was a little touching that Hannibal had faithfully recreated the drawer. Intrigued, Will opened the next drawer.

It contained undershirts, in his size, and casual clothes such as lounge pants and soft sweaters. In the next, there were jeans and shirts, nicely folded to avoid any wrinkles. The last drawer contained pajamas, but not silky, monogrammed sets that Hannibal would have preferred. No, the pajamas Hannibal set aside for him were simple cotton ones, in bland colors.

Heart now beating quickly, Will turned towards the closet. He flicked the light open, illuminating the inside, and his eyes immediately landed upon a variety of fishing poles, leaning against the back wall, away from the clothes hanging up.

"Oh," Will gasped to himself, softly.

He blinked away from the fishing supplies to gaze at the clothes, which of course were a full collection of trousers, dress shirts, and nice suits. The colors were all muted, same as the ones in the dresser, with primarily whites, blacks, and dark shades of other colors. There were no bright colors or ostentatious designs on the suits, unlike the ones Hannibal liked to wear.

But this wasn't Hannibal's closet. This was *Will's* closet, and Hannibal knew exactly what he preferred without ever having to be told.

Will's palms were sweating and his heart was racing, but he didn't know what to do. He wanted to laugh and cry at the same time, since affection, appreciation, shock, and ambivalence were all swirling through his body. He was touched that Hannibal prepared this room specifically for him, and exactly to his tastes. But it was also such a clear expression of love that Will didn't know what to do about it, or how to process it. He wasn't used to Hannibal doing nice things for him.

It felt good to see his strong feelings be returned. Even though he already knew about Hannibal's love for him, it was an entirely different thing to see it in action. It was gratifying to have his love reciprocated, but it hurt at the same time because Will knew that it was too late.

This room was made for him three years ago, before Will betrayed Hannibal and missed his chance to run away together. He was only seeing it now because he had orchestrated Hannibal's escape in order to create a showdown between him, Hannibal, and the Dragon. A major part of him wished for Hannibal to suffer, while an equally major part of him didn't want him to die.

Can't live with him, can't live without him.

Bedelia may have been right about that, Will supposed. It was complicated, and made him unsure about how to feel about this specialized room.

Will needed to clear his mind, and make sure he was relaxed for whatever happened tonight. He wouldn't be of any use to anyone if he was jittery and overemotional.

However, when Will walked into the ensuite he instantly turned and walked right back out.

He could *hear* Hannibal's own shower running from the other side of the bathroom wall. Will's mind took that sound, conjured up the mental image of Hannibal naked in the shower, and it was too much.

Will settled on splashing water on his face to feel refreshed, then changed into new clothes for dinner. He chose some black trousers and a white dress shirt, which he felt was appropriate for the occasion. He didn't want to overdress, but he also didn't want to show up to Hannibal's first meal out of prison with loungewear.

Will tucked the gun into his pants and looked around his room one last time, his eyes lingering on the bed. He hadn't touched it at all, and wondered if he ever would. He pondered on the mattress; was it too soft, too hard, or just right? Were the sheets warm enough, and soft on his skin?

There were too many questions, in this room and in this hallway. He didn't want to dwell on them, so he quickly escaped to the main area of the house.

Hannibal was nowhere in sight and presumably still in the shower, so Will wandered into the kitchen and started checking things out. As expected, the kitchen was large enough for Hannibal to be comfortable cooking many different things at once. There was a large granite island in the middle, and matching granite countertops that held a sizable sink and multiple stovetop burners. A large refrigerator sat at the end of the counter, a wine cabinet next to it.

There were no less than three ovens, but there was only one microwave. Will snorted at that. He couldn't imagine Hannibal using the microwave at all.

Overall, it wasn't as spacious or first-class as Hannibal's kitchen back in Baltimore, but it was certainly nice enough to accommodate Hannibal's tastes.

Will thought about it. If Chiyoh had been taking care of this place for the past three years, did she leave any food or ingredients in anticipation of Hannibal getting out?

The pantry was large, and filled with the normal basic supplies. There were bags of rice, beans, flour, sugar, potatoes and various canned goods and spices. He checked the fridge, and found eggs, butter, and various sauces, but no fresh food. It was only when Will opened the freezer section and got a face full of cold air that he found what he was looking for.

Nestled between bags of ice were multiple, vacuum-packed bundles of frozen meat. Will didn't know all the different kinds, but there was definitely a lot of red meat, and even some seafood.

He chewed his lip for a moment, glancing over his shoulder. Hannibal was still nowhere to be seen and it was getting late, judging by the golden light that filled the house. Will didn't know how long they'd have until the Dragon came, and he didn't want to be interrupted during dinner.

With a long exhale, Will reached into the freezer, pulled out all the packages of meat and seafood, dumped them into the sink, and began running water over them. It took a while to defrost things, and they didn't have time to waste.

After drying his hands, Will walked over to the living room and plopped down on one of the couches. He turned his head to the side and looked out the windows, which were actually the full length and width of the wall. It was strange to be in a house that had so many windows, but Will liked it. It felt like he was actually outside, surrounded by the trees and rocks and lounging among them. He had to give Hannibal some credit for picking this house above all others.

His rare moment of relaxation was cut short when footsteps sounded over the hardwood floor, and Hannibal's voice rang through the silence.

"Will?" he called tightly.

Will stuck his hand up, so that Hannibal would see him despite the back of the couch blocking his view. "I'm here."

There was a soft sigh, and Will heard Hannibal continue his way into the kitchen.

"What would you like to eat?" Hannibal inquired, his voice carrying all the way over to Will with no problem. "I'm afraid that we may not have time for anything grand, but I can whip us up some — "

Suddenly, Hannibal fell silent. Will frowned, and was about to ask what was wrong when Hannibal spoke up again.

"Will," he said. "Why is all the frozen food in the sink?"

Will sighed, preparing himself for a lecture. "I didn't know what you wanted to cook, so I just defrosted everything."

There was a beat of silence, and Will stubbornly did not sit up and look over the back of the couch to see Hannibal's expression.

“An intelligent idea,” Hannibal finally said, clearing his throat. “Thank you.”

Will shrugged, and sank further into the couch cushions. He could hear Hannibal begin preparing whatever it was they were having for dinner, and didn’t want to join him for fear of intruding. This was the first time in three years that Hannibal had access to his own full-functioning kitchen to cook something other than prison food, and Will didn’t want to overstep into that special moment. He knew how much cooking meant to Hannibal.

But on the couch, his mind began working again, creating anxiety about the impending conflict and demanding that Will figure out what to do about it.

Why are you being nice to him when you’re planning on letting the Dragon kill him?

Am I really planning on that? Will wondered. He wasn’t sure. That was certainly one direction to go, but there were other directions too. There was also only so much he could control and manipulate, before the Dragon took over.

Maybe it wasn’t about what he planned to do. Maybe it was about what he wanted to happen, one way or another.

Will knew that he wanted the Dragon to die. The man was dangerous, a direct threat to Molly and Walter but also smart enough to remain at large and run from the FBI for a long while. Will couldn’t allow him to wreak more havoc on innocent families by slipping away from him a second time.

It was easy to figure out his intentions when it came to the Dragon, but Hannibal was another story. Hannibal felt like a melting pot inside of Will, all of Will’s feelings about him dumped into the pot and swirled around into a mixture that was black in color, too dark for Will to see and analyze on his own. He knew some of the concrete feelings he had towards Hannibal, but he wasn’t sure how those would translate into action, intent, or even desires.

Will knew that he was angry at Hannibal. It felt like he was perpetually angry with Hannibal, so much and for so long that Will couldn't even pinpoint the reasons underneath his anger anymore. He just knew that it was exhausting, and he wanted to get rid of it. The angry side of him was the driving force in thinking about killing Hannibal.

But recently, Will also realized another major feeling directed towards Hannibal, one that encompassed almost everything in the melting pot of his feelings about him that wasn't anger. He realized that he loved Hannibal.

It was strange, to accept that the first person he'd ever loved was a man like Hannibal Lecter, with all his sins and fussiness. But when Bedelia had asked him if he *ached,* directly after revealing that Hannibal was in fact in love with Will, he could no longer deny the emotion that lingered inside the deepest pits of his soul.

His love for Hannibal made Will want to be with him, which was in direct contrast to the want of harming him.

But wait, Will asked himself, a new concept forming in his mind. *Are they really so incompatible?*

Maybe Will didn't have to distance himself from Hannibal. Maybe he didn't have to separate their fates. Maybe they could share the same outcome of tonight's meeting with the Dragon…

"Will," Hannibal called, breaking through Will's spiralling. "Dinner's ready."

With a sigh, Will shoved his overactive thoughts into the back of his mind and got off the couch to join Hannibal at the dining table. His analysis of the future wouldn't do him too good, anyway. He never could decide how to act when it came to Hannibal until the key moment arrived.

"What's for dinner?" Will asked as he slid into one of the chairs, a place setting already prepared for him.

“Garlic butter steak and potatoes roasted with rosemary,” Hannibal answered, carrying two steaming plates over. “I apologize for the lack of fresh ingredients, but I hope this will be satisfactory.”

He set the plates down, then took a seat across from Will. The meal looked delicious, as expected. The steak, although frozen solid just a short time ago, was now juicy and aromatic. The potatoes smelled just as good, and Will’s mouth watered at the sight of the meal.

He had missed Hannibal’s cooking.

Will felt Hannibal’s eyes on him as he took the first bite of steak, and an explosion of flavor released inside his mouth with every chew of the tender meat.

“It’s good,” Will reported after swallowing. “Really good.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Even if it’s made without fresh ingredients,” Will added, teasing.

Hannibal’s smile widened, and he picked up his own fork. They ate in relative silence, both men hungry and enjoying the meal. The sun had set by this time, resulting in low light from the ceiling bulbs that reminded Will of his dinners in Hannibal’s old dining room.

He could almost pretend that this was one of those meals, with them eating together and exchanging theories about the latest of Jack’s cases. Even after Will discovered what Hannibal was, those times were always calming.

“I’m glad we were able to come here,” Hannibal mused after they had cleaned their plates of food. “If only so I could cook something half-edible.”

“I’m sure the new clothes are nice too,” Will replied dryly, taking stock of Hannibal’s black slacks, grey sweater, and black blazer. “Although I admit I feel a bit overdressed.”

“It wouldn’t be practical to wear one of my suits,” Hannibal informed him. “Not when I intend to, as they say, get my hands dirty.”

And just like that, Will was reminded of their purpose in being here. He gulped down his glass of water, then grabbed his plate and stood up.

“I’ll do the dishes,” he said.

“I’ll help,” Hannibal responded, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Will rolled his eyes, but proceeded to the sink and began washing the plates clean. This was another thing he and Hannibal had often done together, after their dinners. They’d had a system, wherein Will would wash the dishes and Hannibal would dry them. Without speaking, they fell into that old pattern, with Hannibal picking up a towel and drying the dishes Will had finished washing.

The act was oddly domestic, and both warmed and hurt Will’s heart more than he anticipated.

“I think I’ll pour us some wine,” Hannibal decided when the dishes were clean and neatly put back into their respective places.

Will nodded. A drink would be nice.

Hannibal turned to the wine cabinet adjacent to the fridge, and Will drifted over to the wall of windows. The moon was full, a clear omen of the Great Red Dragon. It was only a waiting game now, until he came out of the darkness to do what dragons did best.

Will stared out into the night, and wondered for whom, out of the three of them, this night would be the last.

"You're playing games with yourself in the dark of the moon," Hannibal started from behind Will. There was a recognizable thud and jingle of a wine bottle and glasses being set down upon a hard surface, which Will assumed was the piano from how close behind him Hannibal sounded.

Will took one last look out into the back patio of the house and the trees beyond it, feeling eyes on him, and turned towards Hannibal.

"Wasn't surprising when I heard from the Great Red Dragon," Hannibal reflected lightly. "Was it surprising when you heard from him?"

Will's eyes landed on Hannibal's hands, cleaning off the wine glasses. He supposed that it was time that they talked about this.

"Yes and no," Will responded plainly.

He knew that Hannibal had already mostly figured out Will's role in the events of the last 24 hours, but speaking about it openly, when Will hadn't yet done that at all, felt like Hannibal was once again calling him out and peeling back his layers.

Only this time, Will did not feel violated or offended when he did. Instead, he felt powerful for having done something so manipulative for Hannibal to pick up on.

Hannibal regarded him for a moment, then turned back to the two glasses.

"Do you intend to watch him kill me?" he inquired.

“I intend to watch him change you,” Will corrected, ignoring the nagging feeling that he was trying to convince himself of that intention more than Hannibal.

He watched Hannibal’s face for any sort of reaction, but the man only grabbed a corkscrew and a bottle of wine. He looked down at the objects in his hands, but after a beat sighed and began to remove the foil from the wine bottle.

“My compassion for you is inconvenient, Will,” he declared with a glance.

Will inclined his head. He would wager it was, seeming as his compassion for Will probably just stopped him from killing Will with the corkscrew in order to save himself.

“If you are partial to beef products, it is inconvenient to be compassionate towards a cow,” Will agreed.

Hannibal chuckled a bit in amusement as he opened the bottle of wine, the cork coming out easily with a *pop.* Will watched as Hannibal brought the cork up to his nose, inhaling the scent of wine deeply. Will wondered if this would be Hannibal’s first glass of wine in three years.

He stood in place as Hannibal plucked up the glasses and walked towards him.

“Save yourself, kill them all?” Hannibal mused as he offered Will a glass.

Will took it, and waited until Hannibal finished pouring wine into his glass to answer.

His mind flashed back to what he’d thought about before, about how he wasn’t sure about his intentions and what he wanted to happen. He wasn’t sure if he would get out of this battle unscathed, or even if he wanted to.

“I don’t know if I can save myself,” Will murmured, suddenly vulnerable. His unguarded eyes flicked up to meet Hannibal’s. “Maybe that’s just fine.”

Hannibal studied him for a moment, and an expression of displeasure flashed across his face before he turned away.

“‘No greater love hath man than to lay down his life for a friend,’” Hannibal said, quoting the Bible. He raised his glass to Will, and Will looked away.

“He’s watching us now.”

“I know,” Hannibal murmured, raising his glass to take his first sip of wine.

Suddenly, the bottle exploded in Hannibal’s hand, sending glass and red liquid all over the floor.

Will didn’t even flinch as Hannibal fell to the ground, and more glass shattered behind him. The windows that Will loved broke apart and collapsed, the largest panes of glass hitting the floor right as Hannibal landed in front of the piano.

Will swallowed as the Dragon emerged from the darkness and stepped inside the house, gun raised.

Putting his hands up in a gesture of nonviolence, Will stepped back a bit, glass crunching under his feet as he did so.

“Don’t run,” Dolarhyde said harshly. “I’ll catch you.”

Will nodded once in understanding, then shifted his gaze to Hannibal.

The man was lying against the right leg of the piano, breathing heavily and pressing against his side where blood was quickly leaking out.

He's been shot, Will realized, not knowing how to feel about that.

"Hello, Francis," Hannibal panted.

Dolarhyde walked to stand in front of Hannibal, completely speechless, his expression one of awe. He was a bit star-struck, if Will had to put a label on it.

Will looked back at Hannibal, then took another sip of his wine.

Abdominal wounds could be life threatening, which would make this little meeting between Hannibal and the Dragon entirely one-sided. However, Hannibal didn't seem like he was going to keel over and die so soon. Certainly not if he was talking this much.

"I'm so happy that you chose life, Francis," Hannibal was saying. "Suicide is the enemy."

Will frowned. It seemed as if Hannibal was mocking Dolarhyde, but there was also a ringing of truth to his words. For a man who'd taken the lives of so many others, Will was interested that he disapproved of suicide, or even cared about other people enough to form an opinion on it.

Will thought he knew everything about Hannibal, but that one little sentence reminded him that there was still so much more about the complicated man that was Hannibal Lecter that he could learn.

Will kept looking down at Hannibal on the floor, and his tumultuous inner desires started to come together and form into concrete action.

“You were seized by a fantasy world with the brilliance, and freshness, and immediacy, of childhood,” Hannibal said through a series of short breaths. “It took you a step beyond alone.”

Dolarhyde slowly knelt down to the floor and began setting up an old film camera.

“I’m going to film your death, Dr. Lecter,” he breathed reverently. “As dying, you meld with the strength of the Dragon.”

Hannibal huffed in what could have been a laugh.

“It’s a glorious,” Hannibal got out, before glancing up to lock eyes with Will meaningfully, “and rather discomforting idea.”

Tuning out whatever Dolarhyde said in response, Will stared into Hannibal’s dark eyes, and in that moment knew that he couldn’t just do nothing while Hannibal lay dying on the floor, at the mercy of the Dragon.

Hannibal’s death had been something he’d fantasized, dreamed, and thought about for years. However, he was never able to really make it happen. That time when he saved him from Mason Verger, then the time when he’d called him to warn him of the FBI’s ambush. Will had thought that this time could be different, but it wasn’t.

No matter what Will thought he wanted… when faced with the reality of Hannibal’s death, like right now, he realized that he didn’t want Hannibal to die after all.

It was a simple realization, but one that he was unable to make until that very moment. Until the moment he was required to choose.

Will didn’t want Hannibal caged, so he got him out of prison. And now, Will didn’t want Hannibal dead, so he was going to act.

It was at that moment when Will slowly reached his free hand behind his back, fingers brushing against the butt of his gun —

— When suddenly, the Dragon rushed him faster than a cheetah and plunged a blade into Will's face, making his cheek explode with pain. Will grunted, shaking with shocking agony and choking on his own metallic blood as the Dragon lifted him up and threw him across the room.

Will spat out a mouthful of blood as the Dragon released him and he hit the ground hard, quickly rolling over mountains of broken glass, out of the house, and onto the hard concrete surface of the backyard patio. He barely had time to breathe before the Dragon was on him again, forcefully yanking him onto his hands and knees.

Will was choking for breath again as the Dragon gripped onto his shoulders and pulled back, harder and harder, trying to break his spine. However, the Dragon's actions left Will's own arms free.

With a shaking hand, Will reached up to wrench the knife out of his own face, crying out in pain as he took it out. Before the Dragon could realize what he'd done, Will was already driving his arm backwards and sinking the sharp blade into the flesh of the Dragon's upper thigh.

The Dragon gave a howl, but before Will could scramble away, the knife was plunged into his right shoulder and his neck yanked upwards.

An incredible burning fire spread throughout Will's shoulder, and his mouth fell open in pain. The Dragon's strong hand was gripping his chin, and Will knew it would take only one firm motion to snap his neck. He was about to die.

But just then, the Dragon grunted and released Will as something knocked into him, pushing Will forward as a result. Will looked over his shoulder as much as he could with his injured cheek and burning shoulder to see something he never expected.

Hannibal had, with a gunshot wound to his side, jumped onto the Dragon's back and tightly wrapped his strong arms around his neck in a chokehold.

Will stayed on his hands and knees, panting and trying to get his bearings despite the wave of pain making his entire body shake. He heard a grunt, followed by a heavy thud, and then a cry of anguish.

Will turned his head to the side to see Hannibal crumpled on the ground near the edge of the patio, the Dragon walking menacingly towards him.

No, Will's fractured mind managed to think. *NO!*

And for the second time that night, Will Graham chose to save Hannibal Lecter from certain death.

Reaching up, Will shakily yanked the knife out of his shoulder with a pained grunt. He got to his knees, struggling with all the slippery blood on the ground, and turned towards the Dragon. When Will saw the Dragon pick Hannibal up off the ground by his neck and start choking him, pure adrenaline rushed through his body and caused Will to surge forward with gritted teeth.

He lunged for the Dragon with the knife outstretched, stabbing him in the lower back one, twice —

— Before he was backhanded across the face, and sent flying backwards through the air, landing on his ass on the hard concrete.

Hannibal felt blind rage mix with the adrenaline coursing through his body as he watched the Dragon roar and knock Will to the ground.

He gasped for air and snarled, trying to get up — but then the Dragon turned back to him, and kicked him hard, right in the face.

Hannibal's body was thrown to the side at the impact, but instead of hitting the hard concrete or even a rock like moments ago, his shoulder collided with a pile of wood.

Hannibal panted as something close to him *clinked* and he blinked, following the sound to find the silver gleam of a small hatchet lying in the destroyed stack of logs.

He grabbed the weapon, the dry wood of the hatchet's handle quickly turning slick in his bloody hand, and pivoted back to the Dragon.

The man had turned away from him for a split second to go after Will, and Hannibal took his chance.

He got to his knees and swung the hatchet with all his strength, cutting a deep gash into the Dragon's hamstrings.

The taller man bellowed in pain, and Hannibal looked up to see Will lunge forward as well, taking his opening to stab the Dragon in his other leg, close to his Achilles tendon.

Hannibal breathed heavily as he swung the hatchet again, making another deep cut into the Dragon's skin and spilling even more blood. His muscles were absolutely on fire from fighting for his life with an injured abdomen, but Hannibal did not fall victim to them. *He* was not the victim here.

But neither was he the sole predator, for there was also Will.

The Dragon crumpled and tried to stand back up, his struggle giving Hannibal the opportunity to get to his feet himself.

His chest heaved and his belly screamed as he straightened up, but all Hannibal cared about was the blood-covered, lethal man across the patio from him.

Will was halfway standing when Hannibal caught his gaze, and the sight of him made Hannibal gasp for air even more than he already was. They made heated eye contact, and time froze.

Will's entire face was smeared with blood, and his white dress shirt was beautifully covered in red splashes and splatters. His hands were slick with it, and Hannibal could see through Will's open mouth that his teeth were also stained in blood.

His eyes were completely clear, however, and they were absolutely *glowing* as Hannibal stared into them.

Something, Hannibal wasn't sure what, passed between them in that instant. It was something intimate, and it was something powerful, and it was something that Hannibal wanted to experience again, every day until his dying day.

Will was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. Looking at him in that moment, both of them panting, aching, and covered in blood, was a religious experience.

He could feel Will's passion and his bloodlust. Will was finally experiencing his full potential, his *Becoming*. But Hannibal could also sense that Will wanted more.

Hannibal wanted to give Will everything, so despite his body's protests, it felt like the easiest thing in the world to once again jump onto the Dragon's back. Hannibal wrapped his legs around the Dragon's arms to hold them back, and enveloped the Dragon's neck with his arms to make sure he was adequately restrained.

Then Hannibal looked up, presenting his offering to Will in the form of an unguarded belly.

Will's eyes locked onto the soft flesh and he immediately closed the short distance between himself and the Dragon, at the very last second before impact swinging his arm around to plunge the knife deep into the Dragon's side.

Hannibal was breathless as Will yanked the blade across, cutting through the Dragon's abdomen like butter and opening him up to let gallons of blood and guts spill out onto the concrete.

Knowing that this was the climax, and wanting to match Will's brutality, Hannibal leaned down to sink his teeth into the Dragon's neck, then forcefully ripped his throat out.

He let go of the Dragon as the man lost strength and fell to his knees, taking the time to swallow the man's flesh. Despite its lack of flavor, it was the best meal Hannibal had ever had.

The Dragon collapsed onto the ground, dead, but Hannibal didn't give him a second glance before limping over to Will.

His beloved was crouched at the edge of the patio, dangerously close to the eroding bluff of the cliff. Adrenaline rushed through Hannibal's body as he approached, breathing heavily at the exertion and at the sight Will made, covered in blood that he had shed.

"It really does look black in the moonlight," Will panted unsteadily, examining his slick hand.

Then he held out that same hand, and Hannibal took it without hesitation.

Will was hoisted up into a standing position with Hannibal's help, stumbling a bit from how much he was shaking until he steadied himself by clutching onto Hannibal's shoulders. Hannibal helped by grasping onto one of Will's shoulders, but his other hand was hesitant.

Will grabbed onto Hannibal's hand and guided it to his waist, exhaling in relief and comfort when Hannibal curled his fingers around Will's hip.

Hannibal was covered in blood, but Will knew he was much worse off. He'd sliced open the Dragon's stomach after all, and let the hot blood spray onto him like a welcoming shower. It felt like a baptism.

Will had done that. He'd stabbed the Dragon, and sliced him, and killed him. All with Hannibal's help, and active participation. He couldn't say he expected that to happen, but he didn't regret that it did.

He had finally given into himself completely. He'd thrown open the locked doors inside him, and knocked down all the walls that restrained him. He'd done what he'd been fighting against for so long, and he *loved it.*

Well, he did it with Hannibal. They'd done it *together.* And Will wouldn't have it any other way.

That moment when Will had glanced up to make eye contact with Hannibal, knife in hand as he prepared to drive it into the Dragon's stomach — that had been the moment when everything fell into place inside Will and he knew, deep down, that there was no going back from this.

"See?" Hannibal panted, his hot breath puffing close against Will's face. "This is all I ever wanted for you, Will." He looked down, uncharacteristically shy. "For both of us."

Will *saw* .

He saw that Hannibal was right, that it was the most glorious thing that both of them could experience together. Will knew that Hannibal only wanted what was best for him, and he was right all along. Killing was what Will needed, what he *craved,* deep down inside.

He'd killed before, in excusable circumstances, and it had been good. Will had liked it.

But now — Will felt like a god, he loved it so much. Killing, *with Hannibal,* was the last piece of the puzzle in his Becoming. It was the epitome of Will's desires, of the love he shared with Hannibal, and on top of it all…

"It's beautiful," Will breathed, squeezing Hannibal's shoulders and coaxing him to look into Will's eyes.

Hannibal's heavy breathing hitched slightly and he did look into Will's eyes, but only for a moment before dropping down to his lips. Will noticed, and he *ached,* and his heart pounded with anticipation.

However, Hannibal did not move any closer.

A single second passed, and Will could not hold himself back any longer.

With his heart in his throat, Will leaned forward into Hannibal's space. He felt Hannibal's hand tighten on his waist, and then Will closed the last centimeters between them and rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder.

He both heard and felt Hannibal gasp, and then Hannibal was moving his head to nuzzle at Will and pulling him closer into their blood-soaked embrace.

Will felt completely at peace with Hannibal leaning against him, their heads angled together in an intimate caress. Will couldn't ask for anything more, and his rational mind knew that *that* was the problem.

Will wouldn't be able to go back after this. He wouldn't be able to leave Hannibal, or prevent himself from killing with him again. It was too good, too *right.*

But he couldn’t give in so easily. If he did, with full control over himself, then he wouldn’t be able to stop the regret that inevitably pervaded his mind and demanded that he stop. Will didn’t want a future like that, of always being haunted by his latent morality.

Can’t live with him, can’t live without him.

It wasn’t a choice that Will could make. He was mentally and emotionally out of control, so he wanted to give control up to something else.

Fate, destiny, God, whatever. Will Graham was tired of being burdened, so he was giving that burden up to them.

This would be the last chance. The last chance to prevent Will from his irrevocable Becoming.

He tightened his arms around Hannibal, wrapping them around his neck in a squeezing hug. If they died, they died together. Will was at peace with that, and judging by how Hannibal was lovingly clutching at Will with everything he had, he was too.

But if they lived… they would be *devastating* together.

Will swayed in Hannibal’s embrace, reveling in his touch. Then, he swayed them harder, hard enough to tip them over the edge of the cliff.

Hannibal didn’t make any attempts to stop him, and before Will realized what was happening, they were falling.

Will had been held close to Hannibal many times. When he was gutted in his kitchen, or when he was drugged in Italy.

This was the first time Will willingly embraced him so tenderly, and there was no violence or mistreatment involved, at least not against each other.

This first time when he embraced Hannibal of his own free will, Will did it with the gentleness and forgiveness of a lover.

Because after all, Will thought as they plummeted into the sea, clutching onto each other desperately, *isn't that what we are to each other?*

Chapter End Notes

IT IS FINISHED

But if you want to read more... I just posted a post-fall fic ;) Read now!!

Thank you so much to everyone who gave kudos and comments!!! I love you <3

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